University of Alberta

Of Stereotypes, Political Rights, and Intersignification: Postcolonial Moroccan Writing

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

Department of Comparative Literature, Religion and Film/Media Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2001

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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Of Stereotypes, Political Rights, and Intersignification: Postcolonial Moroccan Writing" submitted by Christopher Gibbins in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature.

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the representations in contemporary writing of cultural identity in a country which is at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, colonial legacy, neocolonial ventures, and postcolonial ambitions. By analyzing the works of three of Morocco's most prominent literary figures – Tahar Ben Jelloun, Fatima Mernissi and Abdelkébir Khatibi – I demonstrate that the plurality of Morocco's heritage is reflected in the diversity of ways in which identity is conceived, experienced and expressed.

Eschewing the simplistic binary of language politics as well as the limiting conception of "postcolonial oppositional writing," my thesis reveals some of Morocco's cultural contradictions and postcolonial tensions as they are manifest in the three writers I have studied. Collectively these three writers, who have played significant roles in the formation of contemporary Morocco's intellectual and literary fields, articulate well many of the issues facing Moroccans today.

Morocco is a country rich in cultural diversity and postcolonial contradictions. Constitutionally an Islamic Arabic country, its geographical location coupled with the strong and abiding religious, cultural and social influences of the indigenous population have placed Morocco on a distinct historical and cultural path. This path troubles the hegemonizing aspirations of Morocco's constitutional

definition. Its location at the western outreach of the Islamic world set it apart from the historical and cultural trajectories of the Islamic-Arabic "centre" (at times Syria, at others Iraq, Egypt and Turkey). Its proximity to the European continent (it is only 15 kilometers from Spain), on the other hand, has involved Morocco in a long history of conflict and exchange with the European other. That proximity also brought Moroccans into regular contact with their neighbours to the south, Saharan and sub-Saharan, for it acted as a vital trade route for centuries.

To better capture Morocco's cultural diversity and plurality of postcolonial tensions, I examine a range of writings from literature to sociological inquiries to philosophical analyses. Tahar Ben Jelloun, primarily a novelist, struggles desperately with, and is ultimately unable to overcome, Morocco's colonial cultural legacy. Fatima Mernissi, a sociologist, engages with the issue of voice and agency in a modern state but becomes entangled in her search for that agency in the past. Abdelkébir Khatibi, a sociologist and novelist, rejects narrow definitions of identity and embraces the multiplicity of cultural expressions that reflect the hybridity that is contemporary Morocco. The sequence in which the writers are presented in my thesis form a movement of sorts, from the most polarized position – Ben Jelloun – to the most syncretic – Khatibi. The careful study of certain works of these three writers

allows me to explore some of the complex dynamics of contemporary Moroccan society.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my supervisor, Professor Nasrin Rahimieh, whose inspiring undergraduate classes set me on the path to this thesis, and whose constant support, encouragement, enthusiasm, criticism, advice and friendship made its completion possible. Thank you.

I would also like to thank George Lang, a true friend, whose incredibly infectious passion for life is always truly inspiring, and who was as generous with his support and knowledge as he was with his delicious cooking. Thank you.

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Introduction

This thesis is an analysis of the representation of Moroccan cultural identity in the works of three of the country's most prominent literary figures: Tahar Ben Jelloun, Fatima Mernissi and Abdelkébir Khatibi. By no means do I pretend to provide a comprehensive view of literary production in Morocco, nor of the full range of positions in the cultural spectrum. The work of the three writers I have chosen do, however, engage with or reflect upon the key factors in expressions of contemporary culture in Morocco. Collectively they articulate a culture at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, colonial legacy, neocolonial ventures, and postcolonial ambitions. Equally prominent in these representations is the cultural diversity that complicates simple binaries of self/other and native/foreign.

My original ambition when I began this thesis was to define the field of literary and cultural production in Morocco, a direction clearly discernable in my "Works Consulted." Despite the shift in my focus those initial readings provided me with an extremely important foundation which would inform and assist my later thinking. But as my work progressed I came to suspect that such a project would fail to do justice to the complexity of the Moroccan site and would obscure the tensions at work there. This suspicion was borne out when I went to Morocco to do

research; I soon realized that the tensions were multiple and that they were negotiated in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, it became obvious that the clear delineations involved in defining the literary field would disregard Moroccan cultural expressions in which blending, mixing and shifting is the order of the day. A perfect example is the domain of language; Moroccans switch linguistic registers constantly – from colloquial Arabic (Morocco's version of which is known as "darija"), to French (or Spanish in the north), to formal Arabic, to one of the three Berber languages – depending on the speakers' heritage, level of education, social status, as well as the personal, social or professional context he or she is in at any given moment.[1] In this light, I had to quickly dispense with any plans I might have had of a francophone/arabophone binary in literary production. Such a binary not only reflects an essentialist view of linguistic and cultural identity[2] but

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[1] Ahmed Boukous's (a professor at the University Muhammad V in Rabat) two major works Langage et culture populaire au Maroc and Société, langues et cultures au Maroc: Enjeux symboliques provide a fascinating and detailed account of the intricacy and complexity of Morocco's linguistic field, a summary of which can be found in his contribution to Civilisation Marocaine: Arts et cultures.

[2] Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir write of the "assumption that national identities run along clearly defined linguistic boundaries and that languages encode, and therefore propagate, national and hence hegemonic values. This is in fact a belief," they continue, "which is

in the process reproduces and perpetuates colonial attitudes and politics of division.

Following the same methodological logic, I do not wish to contextualize the diverse writings I examine within a paradigm of "postcolonial oppositional texts." Such a framework also creates an artificial binary which simply bears no relation to the myriad forces at work in Morocco, be they of a neocolonial nature issuing from France, Europe, Saudi Arabi and the Gulf States, or the United States, or cultural, embracing French, Arabic, Berber, Egyptian, Hong Kong, Hollywood or Bollywood. I do not share, for example, John Erickson's opinion that "'true poets' [. . .] hold in common an attempt to forge a non-totalizing, alternative discourse that achieves a freeing of difference and serves as a model for those [. . .] who suffer the constraints of unforgiving social-cultural bonds" (Erickson 2). My understanding of the term postcolonial is informed by what Khatibi describes as "un double critique." For him, this term implies a process involving a critique of one's self – of one's past and present – as well as an engagement with the other. The emphasis Khatibi places on the transformative potential of this process is evident in the following passage:

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itself a peculiarly European phenomenon, as is the sentimental 'Berberity' [. . .] which was a particularly destructive tool of French colonialism in both Algeria and Morocco" (Kaye and Zoubir 3).

> Le renversement de la maîtrise, la subversion même, dépend de cet acte décisif de se retourner infiniment contre ses fondements, ses origines, origines abîmées par toute l'histoire de la théologie, du charismatisme et du patriarcalisme, si l'on peut caractériser ainsi les données structurelles et permanentes de ce monde arabe. C'est cet abîme, ce non-savoir de notre décadence et de notre dépendance qu'il faudrait mettre au jour, nommer à sa destruction et sa transformation, au-delà de ses possibilités en quelque sorte. (Maghreb Pluriel 49)

In my own reading of Morocco's postcoloniality, I am not concerned with locating opposition to the colonial past but rather with analyzing responses to an inherited economic, political, social and cultural condition. What interests me is the manner in which this inherently complex process finds expression in a site of cultural hybridity such as Morocco with its three prominent languages – Berber, Arabic and French – its unique form of Islam, its particular political life and its neocolonial economy.[3]

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[3] Both this hybridity and the demands of Khatibi's "double-critique" are lost in an approach such as Erickson's who states that he uses the term "postcolonial" "only for those [. . .] narratives in which we observe a counterdiscourse expressive of an agonistic position consciously undertaken against the controlling norms of dominant discourses" (Erickson 4-5). It seems to me that when Woodhull writes

The three writers I have chosen illustrate well many of Morocco's cultural contradictions and pluralities – at times inadvertently, at others very consciously. To capture some of that diversity, I examine a range of writings, from literature to sociological inquiries to philosophical analyses. Tahar Ben Jelloun, for example, primarily a novelist, struggles desperately with, and is ultimately unable to overcome, Morocco's colonial cultural legacy. Fatima Mernissi, a sociologist, engages with the issue of voice and agency in a modern state but becomes entangled in her search for that agency in the past. Abdelkébir Khatibi, a sociologist and novelist, rejects narrow definitions of identity and embraces the multiplicity of cultural expressions that reflect the hybridity that is contemporary Morocco. The sequence in which the writers are presented in my thesis form a movement of sorts, from the most polarized position – Ben Jelloun – to the most syncretic – Khatibi.

To better understand the circumstances these writers negotiate, it is important to have a sense of the forces that shape the context in which their work is produced. A necessary first step is to remove the study of Moroccan cultural production from the North African setting in which

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that she wants to show how Khatibi's writing is an example of how a "subversive poetics has gradually replaced work for change in the political field," her vision is caught within the same limitations as Erickson's (Woodhull x).

it is too often subsumed. The following is a typical example: "To avoid isolating Maghrebian literature on a disciplinary continent of its own, I have undertaken the feminist analysis of a number of the most frequently discussed texts in Algerian literature in French" (Woodhull xxiv). For Woodhull it would seem to be methodologically acceptable that a number of Algerian texts stand in for the Maghreb as a whole. My aim is not to present Morocco as uniquely different from the other nations in the Maghreb, but I find that initial separation necessary to be able to pay proper attention to the particular complexities of the Moroccan site. To attend to those details I have drawn on a wide-range of sources in my introductory contextualization: historical, sociological, anthropological and political. As the following overview will demonstrate, the very understanding of Morocco's specificity in the Maghrebian context has been the subject of much heated debate.

The term Maghreb, meaning the West in Arabic, once referred to the farthest reaches of Islamic expansion. Today it remains a term of reference for the three North African states of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia which are often assumed to constitute a unified cultural unit.[4] It was perhaps the French occupation and colonization of the region which contributed to reductionist assumptions about

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[4] In geo-political contexts a "greater" Maghreb can also include Libya and Mauritania.

cultural uniformity in the Maghreb. But the history of colonization itself points up interesting differences in patterns of political, social and cultural formation. For instance, J.L. Miège argues in a comparative study of French and British colonization that "often colonisation and decolonisation took place gradually and by different stages in different countries" (35). He goes on to say that "even within just one colony, regional and ethnic differences may cause different reactions to colonisation; in that sense," he adds, "one apparently common past becomes in fact a set of different pasts" (38). Moreover, works as divergent as John Entelis's Culture and Counterculture in Moroccan Politics, which reads like a document written for the State Department, and the canonical anthropological study by John Waterbury, The Commander of the Faithful, stress the uniqueness of Moroccan circumstances. As Paul Rabinow argues, the French colonial policies followed different trajectories in Algeria and Morocco:

> In Algeria, for example, the French carried out systematic policies aimed at destroying traditional (or what they thought to be traditional) social and economic structures and were largely successful. Many groups in Algeria were forced to choose between an almost complete assimilation of French culture or a defensive and embattled Islam. Domination on all levels over an extended period was the given. In Morocco the

> situation was rather different. Dislocation and domination were much less severe than in Algeria. The occupation was some ninety years shorter, there was neither massive colonization nor systematic destruction of local social and economic structures, and the winning of independence was significantly less destructive and bloody. (2)

John Waterbury finds additional reasons for the survival of certain native forms of government in Morocco:

> Morocco is unique in that so much of the traditional governmental and political system survived the half century of direct French rule relatively intact. Certain social groups, such as the tribes or the urban bourgeoisie, were in many instances carefully protected by the French, and even the sultan was, in a way, put in mothballs, to be resurrected at the time of independence in 1955. Many habits of political action that had yet to be unlearned seemed peculiarly appropriate in the post-protectorate years. (4)

To these external factors, John Ruedy adds the presence of Berber traditions that form part of the distinct cultural history of Morocco: "At least as important in conditioning historical evolution as a few decades of French rule are the cultural traditions of the Berbers, whose antecedents could

probably be traced back several thousand years in many Atlas valleys" (92).

The origins of the Berber[5] people is indeterminate. It is speculated by some that the Berbers came from the south, whereas others argue that they originate in the east, in what are now the desert regions of central and western Egypt. What we do know is that they were already well established as a predominantly pastoral people when the Phœnicians first made contact with them in the eighth century B.C. The Arab invaders arrived in the early 680's, meeting more resistance than they had encountered elsewhere. In fact, it wasn't until 710 that the Arabs more or less conquered what is now northern and central Morocco. The fifteenth century Islamic historian Ibn-Khaldûn writes: "The Berber tribes in the West are innumerable. All of them are Bedouins and members of groups and families. Whenever one tribe is destroyed, another takes its place and is as refractory and rebellious as the former one had been.[6] Therefore, it has taken the Arabs a long time to establish their dynasty in the land of Ifrîqiyah [Tunisia] and the Maghrib" (ibn-Khaldûn 131). The Islamization of the Berber

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[5] The word "Berber" comes from the Arabic word (via Latin and Greek), barbari, used to designate the non-Latin speaking peoples of the Maghreb.

[6] Keeping in mind Ibn-Khaldûn's prejudice against what he considered to be the uncivilized nature of pastoral peoples generally.

people took place over a period of two hundred years, although a significant majority converted within the first ten years of Islam's arrival. On a wave of religious enthusiasm,[7] the newly-converted Berbers turned on their conquerors, and by 740 the Arab rulers had been expelled from the whole of the Maghreb. Once repelled, although they would later re-occupy Algeria and Tunisia, eastern Arab dynasties would never again control Morocco. Some, although not many, Arabs remained behind; a far more significant influx of people of Arabic descent would come from the Iberian Peninsula as the Moors were forced out.

An important aspect of the Arab encounter with Berber culture was, of course, religious. Islam's mystical aspect found fertile ground in an already rich local tradition of Berber religious practice. Although forms of mystical expression are to be found throughout the Islamic world, what is particular about Morocco is its importance for a significant portion of the population. A very visible manifestation of these mystical practices is the number of

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[7] In part brought about by the Arab treatment of the indigenous population who were viewed, despite their conversion, as second-class citizens, this rebellion drew its ideological and theological inspiration from Kharijite rebellions elsewhere. The Kharijites – those who had "gone out" from the community – "had a strict, activist position: all those who fall short of the total adherence to the Islamic precepts are unbelievers" (Rippen 61). "Only the virtuous Muslim should rule as imam," explains Hourani, "and if he went astray obedience should be withdrawn from him" (Hourani 31).

religious shrines erected in the honour of a marabout [saint] one finds throughout Morocco to which people, especially women, go to pray for assistance. For an orthodox Muslim such devotions are tantamount to apostasy.

Finally, there is the question of language. Ahmed Boukous, Morocco's foremost linguist on the matter, writes that "Présentement [1995], la langue amazighe[8] est fractionnée en aires dialectales; elle est employée surtout à travers les régions rurales, [. . . et] elle est aussi de plus en plus en usage dans les villes, suite à l'exode rural des Amazighes et à l'urbanisation des régions amazigophones" (Boukous, Société, langues et cultures au Maroc 19). Boukous estimates that forty-five to fifty percent of the rural population speaks one form or another of amazighe as a mother tongue; urban figures are very difficult to determine but it is safe to assume, he says, that in urban centres the

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[8] Boukous presents a number of reasons for his use of the term "amazighe" instead of "berbère" some of which are technical but the first of which is that "Le terme berbère est dérivé de barbare, cette dénomination est étrangère aux communautés qui utilisent cette langue, il est le produit de l'ethnocentrisme gréco-romain qui qualifiait de barbare tout peuple, toute culture et toute civilisation marqués du sceau de la différence" (Société, langues et cultures au Maroc 17-18). In discussing the origins of the language, Boukous subscribes to the thesis that the Berber people originate from the east. He writes that "l'amazighe constitue la langue la plus anciennement attestée dans le pays et au Maghreb en général. En effet, des documents archéologiques de l'Égypte ancienne font remonter l'histoire écrite des Amazighes (les Berbères) à 5,000 ans au moins" (18).

berberophone community is diglossic, speaking Berber at home and with fellow Berbers, but dialectal Arabic (darija) elsewhere.[9] Historically purely oral modes of communication, the Berber languages have been long considered inferior by an Arabicized ruling order, which has shared, I might add, over the centuries, Ibn-Khaldûn's belief in the innate superiority of literate urban culture. It is only recently, therefore, that a small number of publications, most notably collections of poetry, have appeared in Berber, and efforts are being made to establish a standardized form of written Berber. It is also only since 1994 that Morocco has seen televised news broadcasts in Berber and that the language has been offered as a subject in schools (Boukous, Société, langues et cultures au Maroc 34,35). These recent developments notwithstanding, the presence of such linguistic and cultural diversity was felt during the French rule and is part of the history of Morocco's interactions with the foreign domination.

If there exists a consensus among critics with regard to the specificity of French rule in Morocco, there is far less on the particular manners in which the local institutions responded to the colonial presence. For

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[9] This diglossia can be found even within families, as was the case with a friend I had in Rabat, Kamal, whose parents were both berberophone but spoke different dialects. They therefore spoke darija between them.

example, in his ground-breaking work, L'histoire du Maghreb: Un essai de synthèse,[10] Abdallah Laroui states that the old merchant and religious élites "furent induites par la bienveillance de l'administration et le respect apparent des militaires à une collaboration au moins tacite" (330). This is a far more contentious assertion than it may at first appear – particularly with regards to the religious elite. Munson argues in Religion and Power in Morocco that the ulama [the collective of religious scholars] raised no real opposition[11] at any point to the French colonial practices: "What was the political role of the ulama of Fez, the religious and political capital, in the face of the European threat and the commander of the faithful's failure to oppose it?" he asks rhetorically; "By and large," he replies, "it

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[10] Laroui, who is as equally critical of Maghrebi as he is of Western historians, argues that the decolonization of history must involve a process of "double critique" very much like that described by Khatibi. "L'on ne peut qu'être d'accord avec Laroui quand il appelle à repenser l'histoire maghrébine à la fois en dehors du sytème khaldûnien et contre l'historiographie coloniale," Khatibi writes. "Cette double tâche est d'importance épistémologique: il s'agit de décoloniser l'histoire, de restituer le système khaldûnien à l'épistémè arabe classique, afin d'analyser celui-ci comme un produit historique; cette double tâche permettrait de dégager plus nettement le mouvement spécifique des structures sociales du Maghreb, et des articulations hiérarchiques qui s'y imbriquent" (Maghreb Pluriel 81).

[11] Which is not to say that there were never individual members of the ulama who spoke out, as Munson illustrates.

was a passive one" (58). Munson goes on to catalogue the ulama's collective passivity vis-à-vis, or collaboration with, the French occupiers – a practice which he claims continued under Hassan II.[12] Significantly, Munson's work would seem to confirm Laroui's assertion regarding pre-Protectorate patterns, that such collaboration pre-dated the arrival of foreign troops and for the most part typified the ulama's policy of non-interference with the power of the sultan.

More specifically, Laroui argues that "dans l'ensemble, l'élite maghrébine collabora avec l'autorité française" (327) in a manner which was largely consistent with their prior relationship with the ruling sultans. In Morocco, for example, "où Lyautey [France's first resident-general of the Moroccan Protectorate] voyait tout en grand, les terres réputées domaniales, collectives ou habous furent partagées entre grands colons et grands qaids [local government officials]. [. . .] et bien entendu, cette classe de grands propriétaires fonciers, favorisée toujours par le pouvoir, qu'elle dirigeât ou non l'administration locale, était le grand soutien de l'autorité coloniale dans les campagnes" (328).

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[12] It is too early to know what, if any, changes will take place under Hassan II's successor, his son Muhammad VI, who only came to the throne when his father died in July 1999.

In urban settings Lyautey's so-called enlightened policies led to a form of apartheid, as Janet Abu-Lughod points out in her study of Rabat: "out of the 'best intentions' in the world, Lyautey created a system of cultural and religious apartheid, segregating Europeans in new cities laid out on vast open spaces [. . .] while confining Moroccans to the oldest cities, which, he decreed, should be touched as little as possible" (142). What this meant, in fact, was that there was to be

> minimal alteration in the Moroccan quarters, which were to be preserved and protected both from those unwise foreigners who, against their own best interests, might want to live there, and from those Moroccans who, in an undignified attempt to abandon their "noble savage" ways, might wish to improve their homes by modernizing them. (144)

Little changed in this regard upon independence in 1956 as "foreigners sold almost 500,000 hectares of the best agricultural land to a handful of Moroccans who became the new big landlords of the country," thereby "ensuring the continuation of the rural exodus to the cities" well into the postcolonial (or perhaps more appropriately, the neocolonial) period (242). What's more, unlike Algeria, where the flight of foreigners was very sudden, rapid and comprehensive, the departure of foreigners from Morocco was more gradual and peaceful. As a consequence, whereas in Algeria "families moved almost at random into the vacated

villas and apartments" which led to "an abrupt breakdown in the system of caste segregation," in Morocco, the "cities never lost their basic patterns of spatial stratification, although the criterion of access changed from 'ethnicity/caste' to a simpler 'ability and desire' to pay" (252, 253).

As elsewhere, and like other European powers, the French established an educational system which deliberately cultivated a collaborative local elite. Instruction was, of course, in French and students were drawn from the elite already in place. The numbers involved were very small: "only 503 Moroccans passed the baccalauréat during the whole Protectorate period," writes Sluglett (58). In the 1920s the growing nationalist movement established a number of écoles-libres which failed to seriously broaden the educational base for they retained prohibitive fees.[13] Furthermore, the curriculum, which combined "modern" topics with religious instruction, was taught exclusively in Arabic. Students were therefore handicapped upon graduation because advanced studies, historically pursued in France, were not accessible. Nor did the Arabic instruction provide access to administrative posts, for those too required fluency in French. This linguistic friction has by no means disappeared. In March 1964, for example, "secondary school

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[13] Waterbury gives a figure of 20,000 for total enrolment in the écoles-libres in 1954.

students in the Islamic Institute in Fez went on strike to demand the abrogation of the requirement of a knowledge of a foreign language for the baccalauréat" (Waterbury 307), and the language debate continues to fill columns in Morocco's dailies.

Those educated prior to 1956 were easily absorbed upon independence: their numbers were small and they were much needed by a Moroccan administration which had to fill the vacancies created by departing French civil servants. This, however, has not been the case with subsequent generations of graduates, whose numbers have grown significantly due to a policy of universal education since independence. Despite the program's limitations – largely due to a political lack of will – which has meant that the literacy rate remains at a remarkably low 30 to 40 %, the numbers of graduates has increased dramatically.[14]

Other institutions were equally affected by French occupation. For instance, J.C.Vatin writes that "time-honoured institutions – such as village djemaa [tribal council], Muslim charitable trusts and Islamic courts – were salvaged only to be placed in the service of colonial domination" (267). Laroui makes a very similar assertion, but on a far more sweeping scale: "la colonisation semblait

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[14] Entelis writes in 1989 of there being four million students at all levels of the educational system (16), almost four times the figure for 1965 cited in Waterbury (303).

se mouler sur des structures d'accueil qui se préparaient [. . .] depuis le XVI^{e} siècle" (319). The underlying reasons for the adaptability of existing structures of power to colonial rule are often found in Morocco's pre-protectorate past. John Waterbury notes that "at the time of the establishment of the protectorate, the sultanate which had partly governed Morocco prior to 1912 had undergone almost no significant changes in its traditional apparatus. Morocco had not even been subjected to the relative modernization afforded her North African neighbors through Ottoman administration" (33). During the period of the protectorate (1912 - 1956), Sluglett also argues, "the French neither abolished the traditional institutions in Morocco nor introduced permanent replacements for them, the institutions were able to survive more or less intact, and indeed greatly strengthened, while their Algerian and Tunisian equivalents were either abolished or so enfeebled as to perish shortly after independence" (50). He goes on to say that "at whatever cost in lives and human misery, the French authorities and their Spanish counterparts actually unified the Sharifian[15] Empire, in the sense of extending the authority of the sultan to the remotest corners of the country" (56-57).

By far the most significant consequence of this combination of local "decadence" (as both Laroui and Khatibi

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[15] A term which signifies descendancy from the Prophet Muhammad.

call it) and colonial policy was "the weakening of traditional local authorities and thus [. . .] a centralization and concentration of power" (Vatin 268). Khatibi writes:

> Dans une seule société précoloniale (le Maroc), on peut distinguer plusieurs systèmes en conflit: le patriarcal, le tribal, le capitalisme artisanal et marchand, le seigneurial rural et le Makhzen (l'État), lequel n'est devenu dominant réellement qu'après la colonisation, c'est-à-dire que sa capacité de régner a été renforcée grâce aux instruments et aux techniques de pouvoir légués par l'impérialisme. (Maghreb Pluriel 52)

This centralization of power established by the French passed directly into the hands of the sultan upon Moroccan independence in 1956. Consequently, as Munson says (although he is by no means alone in his observation), "the Moroccan monarch actually had more power than any of his precolonial predecessors" (126). The French occupation, as noted by Laroui, had managed to bring about for the Moroccan elite what it had been unable to achieve on its own over the preceding two hundred years: a symbolic concentration of power around the figure Muhammad V due to his forced exile from 1953 to 1955 and his "heroic" opposition to French occupation and the centralization of economic, political and juridical power achieved through the subjugation of the "highland tribes" by the French and Spanish forces.

These structures were reinforced by the increasingly influential nationalist movements of the 1930s and 40s that found in the sultan a symbol of Morocco's threatened sovereignty capable of evoking mass responses the nationalists believed to be able to turn to their advantage. The nationalists did not foresee that in the process the sultan would come to embody a unified Morocco, nor that the sultan's symbolic status would confer on him an impartiality out of the reach of any nationalist movement (Waterbury 49). At the time of independence, the Moroccan monarchy was not only "the legitimate symbol of resistance to the colonial state," but its "recovery of state power prevented it from being crushed by the single party structure which is just as inherent in Moroccan political organisation as it was in neighbouring countries" (Waterbury 252). The monarchy's Sharifian lineage allowed it to maintain "les liens tissés par le pouvoir antérieur au protectorat" (Burgat, L'islamisme au Maghreb 184), establishing a "patron-client" relationship with the old elite much like the days of the old mahkzan (the pre-protectorate sultanate government), as well as reviving the role and powers of the caliphates. Like the caliphs, the Moroccan monarch combined temporal and spiritual powers. It is this delicate interplay between being a religious head, a symbol of nationhood, and a modern administrator which provides the Moroccan monarch with his unique status, power and durablity.

Clifford Geertz argues in Islam Observed that the intersection of the symbolic and the political in the figure of the monarch extends intrinsic religious status upon him. Geertz believes that as a descendant of the Prophet the Moroccan king was, and is, "the supreme expression of the sacredness of Prophetic descent, and the possessor of large and undefined magical powers" (53). Geertz's argument that this makes the king the uncontested and incontestable ruler is undermined, however, by his later admission that despite the "enormous differences in status, power, and function" between the Sultan and "certain descendants of saints and certain chiefs of brotherhoods," they were "all in more or less open opposition to one another" (53). Despite the tensions he himself notes, Geertz insists that Moroccan monarchs continue to benefit from a sacred aura, baraka, bestowed on them through their lineage. Both Laroui and Munson refute this point of view. Laroui maintains that the very propagation of the concept of baraka along with the empowerment of particular religious sects were part and parcel of a "falsification" of Islam at the hands of the French occupiers. Munson also finds little link between religious practices and the institution of monarchy: "I have often heard Moroccan Muslims discuss Islam for hours," he says, "without ever mentioning anything remotely political, let alone the monarchy" (117). Certainly the power of the king has not always remained at a sacred and symbolic level. In fact, as Muhammad Tozy points out, since 1984, following

a series of riots in Casablanca, Nador and Marrakech, the monarchy has adopted a vigorously authoritarian approach to religion: "En outre, on a assisté à la naissance d'une vraie politique religieuse orientée dans une triple direction: le contrôle des mosques, l'institutionalisation d'un 'clergé' et le contrôle des filières de formation du personnel religieux" (Tozy, "Le prince, le clerc et l'État" 72-73).

The politicization of religion in Morocco is not limited to the person of the monarch, nor is it divorced from the colonial legacy that pitted native belief against the values of the occupiers. Geertz writes about the manner in which French rule fostered a discourse of opposition rooted in religion:

> In a curiously ironic way, intense involvement with the West moved religious faith closer to the center of [a Moroccan's] self-definition than it had been before. Before, men had been Muslims as a matter of circumstance; now they were, increasingly, Muslims as a matter of policy. They were <u>oppositional</u> Muslims. Not only oppositional, of course; but into what had been a fine medieval contempt for infidels crept a tense modern note of anxious envy and defensive pride. (65)

Morocco is not unique in its increased focus on Islam as a means of counteracting social, political and cultural malaise. With a population growth of 3.2 percent and an economy incapable of accommodating the demands of higher

numbers of educated professionals, Morocco faces numerous internal challenges. It is to these challenges that many of the Islamist organizations respond. Fatiha is a young law student in Rabat and a member of the "Justice and Welfare Association" founded by Sheikh Abdessalam Yassin who was released by Muhammad VI from the house arrest Hassan II had imposed on him for over ten years. In an interview, she discusses some of the association's work:

> We help people in practical ways. We visit the sick, help them to buy medicine, contribute to funeral expenses, organize evening classes for the schoolchildren and support single women, widows and divorcees. We also contribute to the cost of pilgrimages and provide legal aid for the victims of recognized abuse. Our work is not just spiritual, it is practical, helping people with their everyday problems. With the shortcomings of the state and the tough conditions of daily life, people discover, thanks to us, solidarity, mutual assistance and fraternity. They realize that Islam is about people. Our aim is to gain power peacefully, by persuasion and education. We are against violence. (Ramonet)

As in other Islamic nations marked by colonialism and imperialism, the nation's problems continue to be seen as inextricably bound to the ruptures caused by external powers. Against this background, as Burgat points out,

Islam provides both an oppositional rhetoric and a vehicle for recovering from the losses of the past:

> If mosques have had as much success as they have over the last few decades, it is much less because they speak of God than it is because the vocabulary they use to do so comes from the only place that resisted the cultural pressure from the North. In this case, the apparent "return of the religious" is far less concerned with the resurgence of the sacred in a secular universe than with the rehabilitation of local cultural references, political ones among others. (Burgat, The Islamic Movement 70)

Islam is then part of Morocco's condition of postcoloniality: "Providing the postcolonial dynamic with a language of its own, Islam offers the ideological and symbolic autonomy it had missed vis-à-vis the West, which thirty years after the Arab independences has been able to maintain the pre-eminence of its language in the postcolonial world" (Burgat, The Islamic Movement 64-65).[16]

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[16] Muhammad VI has quite consciously and very quickly taken steps to re-capture the religious and moral authority of his station. "His concern for his fellow citizens is very different from the attitude of his father," writes Ramonet, "and is rapidly earning him the nickname 'king of the poor.' [. . . He] readily travels to outlying villages to bring tanks of water to drought victims, support micro-development projects and encourage other forms of solidarity. He visits the sick

The writers whose works I examine engage with the multiple significations Islam has acquired in postcolonial Morocco.

Equally prominent are these writers' reflections on the need to find alternative modes of engagement with the colonial legacy and neocolonial power structures. Khatibi writes: "nous ne sommes pas arrivés à cette décolonisation de pensée qui serait, au-delà d'un renversement de ce pouvoir, l'affirmation d'une différence, une subversion absolue et libre de l'esprit. Il y a là comme un vide, un intervalle silencieux entre le fait de la colonisation et celui de la décolonisation" (Maghreb Pluriel 47-48). It is the search for constructive, rather than oppositional modes of cultural self-definition, foregrounded in the works of Ben Jelloun, Mernissi and Khatibi that will be the focus of my analysis. I shall devote a chapter to each writer to analyze fully their representations of Moroccan culture, its paradoxes and its complexities.

Ben Jelloun's work draws extensively on Morocco's predominantly Berber cultural heritage and mythology which are interwoven with aspects of Islamic mysticism. The

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and takes care of the destitute. Numbers of stories are told of his goodness, compassion and generosity, and some people literally worship him" (Ramonet). In the same article, Mohamed Tozy, a Moroccan sociologist, confirms in an interview that this "'cuts the ground from under the feet of the Islamists, who had until now monopolized charitable work in the poor neighbourhoods. [. . .] Now the king appears as a major rival in terms of religious legitimacy'" (Ramonet).

cultural diversity in which Ben Jelloun's work is anchored is jeopardized by representational strategies that deploy certain Western stereotypes of the Arab and the Muslim. The problems of voice and representation we encounter in Ben Jelloun's works stem from his very position as a postcolonial writer who is turning a critical gaze on his own culture. My analysis will aim to uncover the precise points of convergence between the discourse of stereotypes and critical self-examination.

In the next chapter, I shall examine the tensions that define Mernissi's pioneering writing on gender issues in Morocco and Islam. Mernissi's work is caught between a desire to challenge Morocco's patriarchal structures, defended by the conservative order on so-called Islamic grounds, and a desire to counter Western stereotypes of the Arab and Islamic world. On the one hand, she wants her native Morocco to look to the West to learn the lesson of universal rights and the link between democratic processes and economic and social development. On the other hand, she strives to situate her feminism within an Arab and Islamic context and to distance and distinguish it from Western feminisms. All of these elements make her work a remarkable admixture of history, theology, sociology and oral history.

Khatibi's writing is the most theoretical of the three writers, and his reflections on decolonization have made significant contributions to the field of colonial/postcolonial studies. Certainly his thoughts

regarding the Arab world's encounter with modernity are extremely important. More remarkable, however, is how those theoretical concerns find expression in his growing corpus on Moroccan, Arabic and Islamic cultural forms. Although Khatibi has published an impressive body of fiction and poetry I have chosen not to incorporate it in my study, and this for a number of reasons. Although much has already been written about his fictional writing, virtually nothing has been said about his non-fictional work on specific cultural expressions. Moreover, Khatibi's reflections on those cultural forms provide the underlying vision for his creative works. Understanding his critical writings help us think through postcoloniality in a manner which extends beyond Morocco. His readiness to embrace all forms of contemporary Moroccan cultural articulation – be it Arab, Berber, French, Spanish, Islamic, Christian or Jewish – and his refusal to restrict Morocco's cultural identity to any one of those elements makes his writing as plural and complex as the culture he writes about. My reading of his corpus attempts to bring to light the breadth of his analysis of contemporary Moroccan culture.

Together, these three writers exemplify the wide range of responses to Morocco's postcolonial condition, illustrating the challenges and paradoxes that are part of the fabric of Moroccan cultural expression.

Tahar Ben Jelloun: Stereotyped Entrapment and Mystical Escape

Tahar Ben Jelloun is undoubtedly the best known North African francophone writer outside of the Maghreb due in no small part to his having won the prestigious French literary award Le Prix Goncourt in 1987 for his novel La nuit sacrée, the first time a Maghrebi (or Arab) writer had received the award. Born in 1944 in Fez Ben Jelloun published his first novel in 1973. Since then his œuvre has expanded to over twenty publications in a number of genres including novels, poems and essays. Prior to his move to France in 1971 (where he completed a doctoral thesis in social psychology regarding the Maghrebi immigrant workers' sexual frustrations caused by their social and cultural alienation[17]) he was involved, along with Abdelkébir Khatibi and Abdellatif Laâbi[18], in the seminal Moroccan journal Souffles in which he published both poetry and criticism. Ben Jelloun's writings have contributed significantly to the increased prominence and acceptance of Maghrebi francophone

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[17] Later published as La plus haute des solitudes.

[18] Abdellatif Laâbi was imprisoned, along with numerous others, including fellow contributors to Souffles, in Morocco in 1972. Condemned to ten years' imprisonment for "atteinte à la sureté de l'État," he was routinely tortured and was not released until 1980, after many years of campaigning by friends, colleagues and sympathizers in Morocco and in France for his release.

writing, both within the Maghreb and abroad (most notably in France). He is also well known in France as a columnist for Le monde where he wrote for well over a decade about the plight of immigrant workers, the Palestinian struggle and racism in France.

Although already relatively well known within literary circles, it was his winning of the Prix Goncourt which brought Ben Jelloun broad public recognition and commercial success, especially in France. I am particularly interested in the commercial success of La nuit sacrée in France and the critical attention it extended to L'enfant de sable, his preceding novel. I shall argue that there exists a correlation between the novels' good fortune and their easy assimilation within a broader orientalist discourse. Specifically, I want to examine how the problematic representation of "the fundamentalist" and "fundamentalism,"[19] in Ben Jelloun's novels leads

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[19] The use of these terms is contentious but I retain them precisely because of their evocation of a certain history in which Ben Jelloun's works become inevitably drawn. One of the problems with the use of these terms is their roots in Christian movements. "Fundamentalist" suggests a return to the "fundamentals" of the sacred text. This extension of the term to Islam raises two problems. First of all, as Sidahmed and Ehteshami point out, all Muslims "agree on the authenticity and primacy of the Qur'an," but the Qur'an is a particularly enigmatic text and "there is no way of taking the entire text of the Qur'an literally" (Sidahmed 2-3). Qur'anic exegesis, therefore, is exceptionally rich and plural, providing room for

necessarily to the activation of a number of other stereotypes regarding "Islam," the "Arab" and the "victimized-Third-World-woman." It is important to make clear that I am not critiquing Ben Jelloun for an "inaccurate" portrayal of contemporary Morocco, or contemporary Islam. His is very obviously a work of fiction and must be read as such. Rather, I note in this chapter how these novels, caught in a stereotyped discourse of the other, have no choice but to conform to the rigorous logic and demands of that discourse. Indeed, such is the logic of the stereotype that it cannot be summoned forth in part only. The stereotype, grounded as it is in generalizations, resists anything less than totalizations founded on a necessary eradication of differences and particularities. I contend that the paradoxical and irresolvable tension that exists in these two novels originate in Ben Jelloun's culturally ambiguous position which is aggravated by a problematically-defined field of literary production. In this sense my analysis seeks to reach beyond the confines of Ben Jelloun's writings and address a problem confronted by

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"literalist" as well as "more liberal or rationalist interpretations" (3). Secondly, the term "fundamentalism," as it is popularly employed, fails to recognize the distinctly political nature of the social movements it seeks to designate. "Curiously," Sidahmed and Ehteshami note, "there are very few works of exegesis by leaders of contemporary Islamist movements;" these leaders are first and foremost "social thinkers and political activists" rather than theologians (3).

all Moroccan francophone writers. Furthermore, if not directly transferable, I believe that many of the dynamics with which these writers must contend are not dissimilar from those faced by postcolonial writers in a multitude of sites.

One of the most striking effects of Ben Jelloun's novels' inadvertent participation in the discourse of stereotypes is that one of their most important intertexts, Islamic mysticism, has not been noted. The central protagonist of L'enfant de sable and La nuit sacrée, Zahra, undergoes a journey that has much in common with the prototypical mystical journeys of the Sufi tradition in Islam. What needs to be examined is the tension that exists in Ben Jelloun's novels between the force of the stereotypes and the equally powerful narrative of mystical quest. While the discourse of the stereotype sets the self and the other at odds with each other, the Sufi discourse strives for their integration. As we shall see, ultimately Ben Jelloun's works succumb to the vortex of the timeless clichés of Europe's "narration of the Orient" in which there was "a deliberate stress on those qualities that made the East different from the West, [and] exiled it into an irretrievable state of 'otherness'" (Kabbani 5). As a consequence, any counterdiscursive potential the mystical intertext may have held is neutralized. To better ground my analysis of the prevalence of Western stereotypes of the Muslim/Arab in Ben Jelloun's novels, I will provide a brief

sketch of the history of these representations. Given the vast array of analyses that have succeeded Edward Said's foundational work Orientalism, I will focus only on those aspects of the history of Western representations of the Arab that are integral to my study of the discourse of stereotypes.

"The projection of evil onto a faraway culture was a significant aspect of medieval Europe's bulwark of bigotry," writes Rana Kabbani in her study Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient; "Islam was seen as the negation of Christianity [. . . and] the Islamic world as anti-Europe and [they were] held in suspicion as such" (5). She notes that "the mental barrier between Christian Occident and Muslim Orient was upheld by ignorance and related myth-making. The West perceived the East as a dangerous region, where Islam flourished and monstrous races multiplied and thrived" (14). This perceived "state of otherness" obviously evolved with time and the contemporary configuration of the Oriental owes much to nineteenth century Western thought:

> L'Oriental – ennemi farouche mais situé sur le même plan au Moyen Age, homme avant tout sous son déguisement pour le XVIII^{e} et l'idéologie de la Révolution française qui en était issue – devient un être à part, muré dans sa spécificité qu'on veut bien d'ailleurs condescendre à exalter.

> C'est la naissance du concept de l'homo islamicus qui est encore loin d'être ébranlé. (Rodinson 83)

Rodinson goes on to explain that "cette vision admirative des civilisations classiques était couplée avec une conception essentialiste des mêmes civilisations. On les supposait dotées d'une essence immuable également, et cette essence, on avait tendance à la chercher dans la religion. De la sorte, la vision essentialiste était aussi une vision théologocentrique" (109). The dominant tendency within Oriental studies was to presume that "tous les phénomènes observables dans la société adhérant majoritairement ou officiellement à la religion musulmane s'expliqueraient par cette adhésion" (120).

Although no longer necessarily the case in Oriental studies (Rodinson 120), this perception remains firmly in place in Western political discourses as well as cinematic and media representations. One need simply consider the manner in which the complexities of such current sites of conflict as Algeria, Palestine or Afghanistan are reduced, more often than not, to the violent, anonymous, unexplained disruptions of "Muslim extremists." It is the staying power of this designation that François Burgat outlined in a presentation he made at a conference in Casablanca:

> Quand les premières réticences au processus du sceau [sur la paix en Palestine] se sont manifestées, comment les a-t-on représentées dans la presse occidentale? Comment les a-t'on

> représentées dans les télévisions? On a dit "C'est du fondamentalisme." On ne s'est pas soucié d'aller constater sur le terrain que le FTLP ou le STNP, formations dont les leaders sont tellement pas islamistes qu'ils sont marxistes et de culture chrétienne, avaient joint sa voie et avaient dit: "il y a des ambiguïtés dans le processus, il y a peut-être des petits problèmes [. . .]." Non, on a dit "fondamentalisme." (Burgat, "Islam 'importé'")

Fundamentalism, it would seem, has become the acceptable and contemporary veneer of an age-old fear of Islam and of Arabs.

Given the prevalence and endurance of these stereotypes, Ben Jelloun would clearly be aware of the gloss they provide to his own heritage and writings. As Saigh Bousta points out, Ben Jelloun's fame has brought him into direct contact with the totalizing tendency of the media as he is increasingly "sollicité par les mass-média occidentaux pour toutes les questions en rapport avec le monde arabe" (Saigh Bousta 7). Ben Jelloun also speaks of his reluctance to conform to received notions of the Arab and the Muslim: "Je ne voulais pas participer à cette émission," he writes of a particular incident in 1984, "J'en avais assez d'être l'Arabe de service et de passer pour le spécialiste de l'immigration, d'autant plus que personne ne m'a jamais désigné pour être le porte-parole de la communauté

maghrébine" (Hospitalité française 9). The media creation of such "experts" and the nature of the questions they are asked entrench an assumption of profound and unfathomable difference between the West and the Arab world. These creations in turn become an invincible force.[20] It is to the nature of that force and the manner in which it functions within Ben Jelloun's novels that we shall now turn our attention.

L'enfant de sable and La nuit sacrée recount the story of a young person whose father, driven to despair at having fathered seven daughters but no sons, decides that the next child "sera un mâle même si c'est une fille!" (L'enfant de sable 21). Although born female the child is named Muhammed Ahmed, and L'enfant de sable tells the story of "his" youth. La nuit sacrée begins with the birth, so to speak, of Zahra, liberated by her father's deathbed confession of his decision twenty years earlier to suppress her "true identity" by raising her as a son. La nuit sacrée is the story of Zahra's coming out as a woman and the violence with

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[20] A point nicely illustrated in a recent article in Le Monde diplomatique regarding France's continuing inability to confront its colonial legacy in Algeria. The author notes that the fact that school text books implicitly associate the Algerian war with a crusade does not seem to present any difficulty to most instructors: "Les mots qui reviennent le plus souvent - les Européens, les musulmans - ne sont pas très exact," comments an instructor, "mais ce sont les plus commodes" (Maschino 9).

which her attempts at sexual and emotional fulfillment are met.

Interestingly, the title of the novel resonates with the promise of transcendence and hope. "La nuit sacrée" [Aid el-Kdir] is one of Islam's most holy nights. The twenty-seventh night of the month of Ramadan, it is said that the Qur'an "descended" on that night. It is the night that one's prayers are worth the equivalent of one thousand months of prayer. It is the night that Muhammad was transported by the Archangel Gabriel to Jerusalem and to the heavens. This night has symbolic and mystical significance that also provides a link to the mystical dimensions of the novel I shall be discussing later. Even more significantly, however, the celebration of this night in contemporary Morocco has a particular focus on young girls.

When I was in Rabat for the Aid el-Kdir I witnessed a remarkable festive scene. The streets and sidewalks were overwhelmed by a multitude of people. The movement and the mood of the crowd reflected the spiritual intensity of the night. Burning incense clouded the night air and thousands of voices raised in prayer could be heard through the open doors of mosques normally kept closed. Most striking about the evening was the way in which young girls dressed in bridal clothes – embroidered gowns, gold tiaras – posed for photographs on miniature versions of the decorated chairs used for transporting a bride. Whether Ben Jelloun had such scenes in mind in his depiction of Zahra's liberation on

this night, he would seem to invest Zahra's fate with hope and possibility.

Unfortunately, the novels' emphasis on Zahra's double identity as male and female foregrounds inequity as inherent to the Islamic cultural context depicted in them. On only the second page of L'enfant de sable we hear Muhammed Ahmed speak of "le bruit strident de l'appel à la prière mal enregistré et qu'un haut-parleur émet cinq fois par jour," which is no longer "un appel à la prière mais une incitation à l'émeute" (L'enfant de sable 8). The call to prayer, perhaps the most commonly recognized signifier of Islam for a Western, Christian audience,[21] is not only associated with but equated with violence. In one simple sentence all calls to prayer have become "an incitement to riot" and Islam has been thereby reduced to a very particular representation of fundamentalism.

Consistent with Edward Said's observation that "there is an unquestioned assumption that Islam can be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés" (Covering Islam xi), the presence of a number of these clichés in Ben Jelloun's novels leads to a disturbing conflation of fundamentalism and Islam. The invocation of

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[21] See as a typical example, the cover of Alfred Guillaume's introductory work, Islam, on which figures a nineteenth-century painting of a muezzin crying out the call to prayer from a minaret.

the cliché of fundamentalism at the beginning of L'enfant de sable activates a string of stereotypes which subtly shape the reading of these texts. Ben Jelloun's novels, which undoubtedly are intended, in part at least, as a critique of the repressive nature of a certain expression of Islam, fall prey to the very rhetorical devices they deploy. That is, the activation of the cliché of "the violent fundamentalist" necessarily, in turn, activates a stereotyped perception of Islam as a whole. Just as the European medieval representation of Islam served "not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian" (Said, Orientalism 60), so the image of brutality, domination and fanaticism in these two novels would seem to represent Islam for contemporary consumption.

"Among the many themes that emerged from the European narration of the other, two appear most strikingly," writes Kabbani: "The first is the insistent claim that the East was a place of lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterized by inherent violence" (6). Sadly La nuit sacrée is not only replete with such imagery but repeatedly intertwines the two. For example, Zahra, still living as a male but now conscious of her new identity, comments that

> En me prosternant [pour les prières], je ne pouvais m'empêcher de penser au désir bestial que mon corps – mis en valeur par cette position – susciterait en ces hommes s'ils savaient qu'ils

> priaient derrière une femme. Je ne parlerai pas ici de ceux qui manipulent leur membre dès qu'ils voient un derrière ainsi présenté, qu'il soit celui d'une femme ou celui d'un homme. Excusez, cette remarque, elle correspond, hélas! à la réalité [. . .]. (36)

Sexual depravity, it seems, lies at the heart of Islam, within its mosques in the very act of prayer. What is more, this sexual desire is "bestial," uncontrollable, indiscriminate and would seem to possess all Muslim men. The threatening nature of this sexuality fulfills its violent necessity when Zahra is later raped. I shall quote the passage at some length to illustrate how systematically the text interweaves the themes of violence, sexuality and religion:

> Je marchais en pressant le pas. Peu de mètres nous séparaient. Je l'entendais marmonner quelques mots comme une prière. Il n'était plus question de fauve déchirant le corps d'une jeune fille, mais de Dieu et de son prophète. Il répétait cette incantation:
>
> — Au nom de Dieu le Clément et le Miséricordieux, que le salut et la bénédiction de Dieu soient sur les prophètes, notre maître Mohammed, sur sa famille et ses compagnons. Au nom de Dieu, le Très-Haut. Louanges à Dieu qui a fait que le plaisir immense pour l'homme réside en

l'intériorité chaude de la femme. Louanges à Dieu qui a mis sur mon chemin ce corps nubile qui avance sur la pointe extrême de mon désir. C'est le signe de sa bénédiction, de sa bonté et de sa miséricorde. Louanges à Dieu, louanges à toi ma sœur qui me précèdes pour que je sente ton parfum, pour que je devine tes hanches ét tes seins, pour que je rêve de tes yeux et de ta chevelure. [. . .]

Je sentis l'homme s'approcher de moi. Il tremblait et balbutiait quelques prières. Il me prit par les hanches. Sa langue parcourait ma nuque, puis mes épaules; il s'agenouilla. Je restai debout. Il embrassa mes reins. Ses mains étaient toujours sur mes hanches. Avec ses dents il dénoua mon saroual. Son visage en sueur ou en larmes était plaqué contre mes fesses. Il délirait. D'un geste brusque il me mit à terre. Je poussai un cri bref. Il mit sa main gauche contre ma bouche. Avec l'autre il me maintenait face à la terre. [. . .] Je sentis un liquide chaud et épais couler sur mes cuisses. L'homme poussa un râle de bête. Je crus entendre une nouvelle invocation de Dieu et du Prophète. Son corps lourd me tenait collée au sol. Je glissai ma main droite sous mon ventre. Je palpai le liquide que je perdais. C'était du sang. (61-62)

This passage contains all of the attributes Kabbani identifies in the medieval portrayal of the Orient, and later in nineteenth century travel writing: the idea that Islam is, by definition, sexually depraved as Muhammed had "brought in God to warrant his own sexual indulgences" (Kabbani 15); the necessarily bestial nature and expression of that desire "since [Orientals] were lower down on the chimerical scale [of being], [and therefore] shared many qualities with animals, of which unbridled sexual ardour was one" (8); and finally that "the cruelty of the Oriental in narrative constructions went hand in hand with his lasciviousness" (19). I have no doubt that in passages such as the one I have quoted above Ben Jelloun seeks to critique the distortions of Islamic beliefs. But the careless conflation of Islam and instances of depraved behaviour feed into the long-standing images Ben Jelloun's French readers might not be able to disengage from the totality of the religion.

This fusing of sex, violence and Islam finds its quintessential expression in the attack upon Zahra perpetrated by "une secte de sœurs musulmanes, fanatiques et brutales" (157). These "sisters" appear and carry out <u>that</u> act, the mere mention of which is enough to rouse Western outrage at the Muslim other, the cliterodectomy:

> On va te débarrasser de ce sexe que tu as caché. La vie sera plus simple. Plus de désir. Plus de plaisir. Tu deviendras une chose, un légume qui

> bavera jusqu'à la mort. Tu peux commencer ta prière. Tu pourras crier. Personne ne t'entendra. Depuis ta trahison nous avons découvert les vertus de notre religion bien-aimée. La justice est devenue notre passion. La vérité notre idéal et notre obsession. L'islam, notre guide. Nous rendrons à la vie ce qui lui appartient. Et puis nous préférons agir dans l'amour et la discrétion familiale. A présent, au nom de Dieu le Clément et le Miséricordieux, le Juste et le Très-Puissant, nous ouvrons la petite mallette [. . .]. (159)

The cliterodectomy functions as the perfect locus for two mutually supporting stereotypes for it has come to signify all that is considered most barbaric, violent and backward in Islam, as well as being the quintessential signifier of the victimization and oppression of the Muslim Arab woman. This representation and definition of female identity as inextricably bound to sexuality is what Angela Gilliam calls sexualism. Ben Jelloun's caricatured representation of the over-zealous "Muslim" sisters who reduce Zahra's identity to her sex – "Rappelle-toi, tu n'es qu'un trou entouré de deux jambes maigrichonnes. Et ce trou on va te le boucher définitivement" (159) – finds an ironic counterpoint in a discourse of Western outrage towards cliterodectomies, echoed in Western feminists' uniform, almost obsessive outcry against its practice. As Gilliam notes:

> One of the most tendentious and divisive points raised by Western women during [the 1980 Women's Mid-Decade Meeting in Copenhagen] concerned cliterodectomy [. . .]. This became a rallying point for Western women, and as they promoted this issue, it seemed to establish a hierarchical relationship to their Third World sisters through intellectual neocolonialism. It revealed latent racism, because the form in which issues were articulated was in terms of those "savage" customs from "backward" African and Arab cultures. Underlying this formulation was the implicit evidence of a rising anti-Arab and anti-Islamic fervor that was starting to emanate from Western countries. (218)

Replicating some of the same logic at work in Western feminist writing about their Third World counterparts, Ben Jelloun's critique of sexual repression leaves little room for a reading free of bigotry. Intended, I assume, to be understood as a hyperbolic expression of sexual repression, the cliterodectomy is described by the narrator/protagonist of the novel as distinct from the tenets of Islamic belief and practice:" J'ai appris plus tard que la torture qui me fut infligée est une opération pratiquée couramment en Afrique noire, dans certains régions d'Égypte et du Soudan. [. . .] J'appris aussi que jamais l'islam ni aucune autre

religion n'ont permis ce genre de massacre" (La nuit sacrée 163).

Despite this caveat, the cliterodectomy is presented as an act of revenge upon a woman accused of stealing the family fortune, rendering it even more gratuitous and devoid of social import. The arbitrary nature of the violence perpetrated feeds into a constructed image of Morocco as beholden to irrational and regressive beliefs.[22] Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi writes that:

> if we are to assess correctly women's prospects and future in Muslim societies, we have to relinquish simplistic stereotypes that present fundamentalism as "an expression of regressive medieval archaisms," and read it on the contrary as a political statement about men undergoing bewildering, compelling changes affecting their economic and sexual identity – changes so profound and numerous that they trigger deep-seated, irrational fears. (Beyond the Veil ix)[23]

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[22] This being all the more problematic when one considers that cliterodectomies are not carried out at all in Morocco.

[23] François Burgat explains that "Providing the postcolonial dynamic with a language of its own, Islam offers the ideological and symbolic autonomy it had missed vis-à-vis the West, which thirty years after the Arab independences has been able to maintain the pre-eminence of its language in the postcolonial world" (The Islamic Movement 64-65). He adds that "Islamic discourse is above all a means of resisting the

The force of the stereotype, entrenched as it is within a public (French) discourse, ignores and over-writes such complexities and pluralities, regardless of an author's intentions.

Beyond this particular stereotype, Zahra is also set in stark opposition to her "Muslim sisters." She is also persecuted by "La Femme Assise," the only other prominent female character. This individualism, which was not missed by the critics – "hymne à la gloire d'une femme," writes one, "victoire d'une femme sur une société enfermée dans ses rites et ses interdits" declares another (qtd in Déjeux, "Réception critique de La nuit sacrée" 29)[24] – is juxtaposed with the exaggerated erasure of her sisters' identities:

> La porte s'ouvrit et comme au théâtre je vis entrer l'une après l'autre cinq femmes, toutes habillées de la même façon: djellaba grise, foulard blanc cachant les cheveux à partir des sourcils, mains gantées, visage pâle sans la

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State. [. . .] The 'Allah Akbar' that emanates from the mosques, therefore, usually has a double message of rejecting both the West and the secular government accused of being its servant, allowing challenges to the methods of the prince to be clothed in the protection of religious demands" (77).

[24] Déjeux comments with obvious frustration: "Le thème de 'la' femme arabe est assez constant dans les médias" ("Réception critique de La nuit sacrée" 28).

> moindre trace de maquillage. Toutes laides, elles dégageaient le malaise. (157, emphases added)

This erasure of individuality participates in the more expansive "homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group," which "produces the image of an average third world woman" (Mohanty 56). "This average third world woman," Mohanty continues, "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)" (56). Muhammed Ahmed's mother, for example, is described as "une femme sans caractère, sans joie, mais tellement obéissante, quel ennui! Être toujours prête à exécuter les ordres, jamais de révolte" (La nuit sacrée 23). When in the hammam with his mother, the young boy comments that "pour toutes ces femmes, la vie était plutôt réduite. C'était peu de chose: la cuisine, le ménage, l'attente et une fois par semaine le repos dans le hammam" (L'enfant de sable 34). This reductionist vision divides the world into two spheres – the private and the public: "the former world is invariably described as domestic, narrow, and restricted," writes Cynthia Nelson, "whereas the latter is described as politically broad and expansive" (552).

The Moroccan writer Ghita el-Khayat objects to such qualitative attributions. She acknowledges that "les femmes ne furent pas les 'hommes' de la Cité et furent écartées de

toutes les institutions," but insists that "Il leur fallut bien exister en contrepartie cachée du/par le monde masculin dans un rapport que nous croyons pour notre part complémentaire" ("Marocaines soumises" 83). Challenging the image of the defeated Moroccan woman Khayat cites not only the fact that "ce sont elles qui ont assuré la lutte profonde, intérieure, contre la fracture coloniale" (86),[25] but argues that the rich and diverse range of creative forms of expression she has found amongst women throughout Morocco "n'est pas le fait de femmes serviles ou avilies. C'est une transmission triomphale d'un matrimoine servi par des générations extraordinaires de femmes qu'il faut absolument tirer de l'oubli, revaloriser et transmettre sans dérives esthétiques ou morales" (86). Khayat is not an apologist for a patriarchal order, nor is she suggesting that women should not fight for equal rights in every aspect of their lives. Instead she challenges totalizing narratives that fail to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of female agency in Moroccan history: "la soumission des femmes

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[25] Moroccan journalist Zakya Daoud also writes that "ce sur quoi il faut insister c'est le support sociétal qu'elles ont constitué, au point qu'il est raisonnable de penser que sans l'apport des citoyennes maghrébines, les luttes de libération n'auraient pu ni se poursuivre, ni réussir" (Daoud 18).

[marocaines] [. . .] est un mythe, dans le présent comme par le passé" (86) she declares.[26]

The paradox, of course, is that Ben Jelloun's novels are read as coming from "the inside": "Le critique insiste sur la traduction française de la sensibilité marocaine," writes Jean Déjeux of a typical review ("Réception critique de La nuit sacrée" 25), and notes that Ben Jelloun is viewed as "le romancier [qui] parle 'de l'intérieur de l'Islam'" (29). Ben Jelloun's novels provide francophone readers the delightful union of an "authentic" Moroccan and a critical French voice. Ben Jelloun's masterful and poetic use of the French language, a point raised time and again by French critics, confers upon him the necessary critical and rational distance that is assumed to balance the view of an insider: "Une fois de plus donc," comments Déjeux, "un critique perçoit ce que la langue du romancier laisse transparaître comme richesse culturelle et sensibilité différente à travers l'universalité de la langue française" ("Réception critique de La nuit sacrée" 25). This linguistic and cultural buttressing functions in very much the same manner as English did in the travel literature of the nineteenth century: "the very fact that the book was in

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[26] Daoud expresses the same sentiment when she writes that "contrairement aux apparences ce ne sont pas, elles n'ont jamais été des femmes soumises. Elles ont toujours su exprimer à l'homme soit par la force, soit par la dérision, soit par la ruse, que sa domination était factice" (Daoud 33).

English," writes Kabbani, "made it 'the most truthful and detailed account' – its Englishness was not merely a linguistic coincidence; rather it conveyed cultural and political status" (39). Much as this travel writing "offered Europe what Europe wished to see" (Kabbani 82), Ben Jelloun's novels offer France what France wants to hear, and confirm in the process its deepest fears about an "evil" force which "threatens" it not only from beyond, but also now, from within.

If Zahra is set apart from the other female characters of the novel, she is also enlisted to become the "seeing eye, and the recounting voice" (Kabbani 6) of the secluded and protected female interiors that have long excited the Western imagination. Zahra's journey through the various stages of her life appear to satisfy the demands of the stereotype of an Orient steeped in perverse sexuality:

> Ce que je vis en arrivant à la chambre médiane [du hammam] n'était pas une vision: la sœur, avec juste une serviette autour de la taille, était assise sur le Consul étendu à plat ventre. Elle le massait en étirant ses membres, accompagnant ses gestes de petits cris qui n'étaient pas des cris de plaisir mais ressemblaient quand même au bruit des baisers rentrés. C'était curieux de les voir dans cette position et d'entendre le Consul dire: Allah! Allah! comme lorsque je lui lavais les pieds. Une petite claque sur la fesse

> suffisait pour que le Consul changeât de position. Lui qui était mince et long se retrouvait entièrement imbriqué, noué, au corps gras et lourd de l'Assise. Ils en tiraient tous les deux un plaisir certain. [. . .]
>
> Étais-je dans le sommeil ou dans le hammam? J'entendis des cris langoureux, suivis de râles. Et je vis – en fait je crois avoir vu – le Consul recroquevillé dans les bras de sa sœur. Elle lui donnait le sein. Il tétait comme un enfant. Je ne réussis pas à savoir lequel des deux poussait ces râles de plaisir. (89, 91)

Zahra's accounts of what she witnesses in the hidden interiors can be read as all the more authentic, coming as it does from "one of them." Zahra can speak with authority from that "inside" so sought after but normally hidden from view.[27] Reviewers seem to have accepted the stereotypical vision uncritically, as we see in the following examples culled by Déjeux from a number of different reviews: "la manière orale du conte oriental séduira le lecteur d'une époque attirée par l'étrange, par le merveilleux, au point de regoûter aux délices de tel récit médiéval" (qtd. in Déjeux, "Réception critique de La nuit sacrée" 25); "On

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[27] One reads in the publisher's descriptive piece which preceeds the novel L'enfant de sable: "Inspiré d'un 'fait divers' authentique [. . .]."

baigne dans un climat de sensualité exacerbée, d'érotisme où parfois le lecteur étouffe comme en face d'une plante vénéneuse, dans un climat malsain" (26); "on se laisse volontiers entraîner dans l'univers fabuleux, sensuel, révolté" (29); the novel recalls "la grande tradition des récits orientaux qui marient plus que tout autre les allégories des destins aux réalités de l'Islam" (26).

At the core of these views is an eager embrace of the spectacle offered by Ben Jelloun's novels. Just as the stereotype of the sexualized hammam, for example, served to deliver the Orient as entertainment to a nineteenth-century audience, so too is Morocco delivered to us as spectacle through Muhammed Ahmed/Zahra's tale. For this notion of spectacle I draw on the work of Rey Chow who speaks of "the cross-cultural syndrome [. . .] in which the 'Third World,' as the site of the 'raw' material that is 'monstrosity,' is produced for the surplus-value of spectacle, entertainment, and spiritual enrichment for the 'First World'" ("Violence in the Other Country" 84). As Chow points out, embedded in such representations of the Third World are anxieties about the self which are projected onto the other.

The novels' representations trigger cascading readings: first, as we have seen, the necessary companion to the stereotype of the fundamentalist is that of the victimized Muslim woman; this victimized woman, as other, in turn comes to stand in for a brutalized "Morocco" – that liberated, rational Morocco that is denied by (a stereotyped) Islam.

If Zahra is the authoritative voice of a liberated discourse, then Morocco, as this victimized "other," becomes a foil for the West's own threatened sense of self. Zahra functions in our literary imagination as a "symptom" of the stereotype of the Islamic, Arab, male other. This other, in turn, functions as the "symptom" of a secular, liberated and egalitarian Western identity:

> If we conceive the symptom as it was articulated in Lacan's last writings and seminars [. . .] namely as a particular signifying formation which confers on the subject its very ontological consistency, enabling it to structure its basic, constitutive relationship to enjoyment (jouissance), then the entire relationship is reversed: if the symptom is dissolved, the subject itself loses the ground under his feet, disintegrates. In this sense, "woman is a symptom of man" means that man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom: all his ontological consistency hangs on, is suspended from his symptom, is "externalized" in his symptom. In other words, man literally ex-sists: his entire being lies "out there," in woman. (Žižek 155)

This is not to say that Ben Jelloun's novels speak only to modernist anxieties in the West. Morocco's own problematic encounter with modernity is obviously also invoked in L'enfant de sable and La nuit sacrée. In fact, the novels'

depictions of Islamic fundamentalism stress an anxiety about loss of "authentic" beliefs and values. Ben Jelloun engages with the fears of contamination of Islam in his harsh portrayals of the self-appointed defenders of "fundamental" Islamic values. But he also sets them against a long-standing tradition of challenge from within Islam in the form of mysticism.

Steeped in the mystical traditions of Islam, Zahra's journey alludes to the possibility of countering discourses of fundamentalism.[28] In Ben Jelloun's treatment Sufism stands in as a challenge to Islamic orthodoxy and provides an alternative to the more repressive aspects of Islamic practices he critiques elsewhere in the novels. Together, L'enfant de sable and La nuit sacrée neatly re-contextualize and re-situate the Sufi's path. Before tracing Zahra's mystical journey, however, I will provide a brief overview of the history and reception of Sufism in Islamic thought.

Sufism, derived from the Arabic word suf, "wool," due to the nature of the preferred garments worn by early Sufis, has come to designate the mystical tradition within Islam. "Initially a purely ascetic movement" which came into being in the early eighth century, writes Annemarie Schimmel,

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[28] Although one might be tempted to read Zahra's mystical journey as a privileging of women's practices within Islam, such a reading is hampered by the fact that, as we have seen, she is the only female character in these two novels who does not submit.

Sufism "strove to counteract [. . .] the Muslims' increasing worldliness and to remind them of their religious duties" (My Soul is a Woman 34). As Ernst insists in his general introduction to Sufism, and Massignon makes quite clear in his exhaustive study of the life of an individual Sufi (al-Hallaj), Sufism cannot be separated from Islam. Ernst writes that

> the works written to expound Sufism in the tenth and eleventh centuries take great pains to link Sufism first of all with the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, to emphasize their close relationship with divine revelation and its messenger. Next, these Sufi authors [. . .] placed great stress on their status [. . .] as complementary to the masters of other Islamic religious sciences (such as law and the study of Muhammad's sayings) [. . .]. (25)

Muslim intellectuals took it as a given that Sufism was an expression of Islam, as is obvious in this commentary by Ibn-Khaldûn, North Africa's famous fifteenth-century philosopher and historian. Not only does this passage affirm the Islamic nature of Sufism, it also provides a nice synopsis of some of its tenets and prescriptions:

> Sufism belongs to the sciences of the religious law that originated in Islam. It is based on the assumption that the practices of its adherents had always been considered by the important early

> Muslims, the men around Muhammad and the men of the second generation, as well as those who came after them, as the path of truth and right guidance. The Sufi approach is based upon constant application to divine worship, complete devotion to God, aversion to the false splendour of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, property, and position to which the great mass aspire, and retirement from the world into solitude for divine worship. These things were general among the men around Muhammad and the early Muslims. (358)

The Sufi approach to divine worship is focused on attaining unity with God through specific practices described by Schimmel:

> Once the seeker has set forth upon the way to this Last Reality, he will be led by an inner light. This light becomes stronger as he frees himself from the attachment of this world or – as Sufis would say – polishes the mirror of his heart. Only after a long period of purification [. . .] will he be able to reach the <u>via illuminativa</u>, where he becomes endowed with love and gnossi. From there he may reach the last goal of all mystical quest, the <u>unio mystica</u>. This may be experienced and expressed as loving union, or as the <u>visio beatifica</u>, in which the spirit sees what

> is beyond all vision, surrounded by the primordial light of God; it may be described as the "lifting of the veil of ignorance," the veil that covers the essential identity of God and creatures. (Mystical Dimensions of Islam 4)

This quest for knowledge of the divine and spiritual perfection came to clash with the more worldly and political aspirations of institutional Islam, however. Nowhere is this conflict more apparent than in the life of the ninth-century sufi al-Hallaj. A sketch of his life provides a helpful summary of some of the spiritual aspects of sufism and their political consequences. Fascinatingly, al-Hallaj's presence as both a towering mystical figure as well as one who confronted the political and religious status quo, flutters across the pages of all three writers considered in my thesis, and is explicitly referenced by each writer. His pre-eminence coupled with the historical (and geographic) distance which seperates him from these contemporary writers makes al-Hallaj a perfect vehicle, in some respects, for both critical and intellectual commentary which, if voiced through, or projected onto, a more contemporary Moroccan mystic (for example) could present a number of difficulties. This overview will shed light on the representation of the mystical quest in Ben Jelloun's novels and the tension the novels foreground between orthodox belief and individual fulfillment.

Born in Persia in 857, al-Hallaj knew the Qur'an by heart before he was twelve years old and began to pursue, at a very early age, a knowledge of the inner meaning of its suras. He studied with a Sufi master until the age of twenty, received the habit of the Sufis and led an ascetic life. On the occasion of his first pilgrimage to Mecca, he remained "in a state of perpetual fasting and silence" for a year, seeking a personal path towards union with God. Al-Hallaj began to speak publicly of his personal union with God, which disturbed many Sufis for it went against their customary secrecy. This practice of secrecy was in part a response to past persecution, but it had come to be seen by many as a self-righteous cultivation of superiority.

When al-Hallaj returned from his pilgrimage, he replaced his Sufi habit with a "lay" one. He preached ever more openly and freely, urging others to seek God within their own hearts, and began to gather a number of disciples (at least four hundred accompanied him on his second pilgrimage to Mecca). Having already angered Sufi brethern, al-Hallaj's call for individual interpretation and reflection troubled an increasing number of more orthodox Shi'ites. Challenged on one occasion by an orthodox opponent, al-Hallaj is said to have declared what was to become the most infamous of Sufi phrases: Ana'l-Haqq, "I am the Truth," "proclaiming he had no other 'I' than God" (Massignon, "Al-Halladj" 100). Al-Haqq is one of the ninety-nine names attributed to Allah in the Qur'an, and the

most commonly used name for Allah amongst Sufis. Al-Hallaj could be understood, therefore, and was later so accused, as having exclaimed that he was God.

Al-Hallaj's preachings generated a movement of moral and political reform around him in Bagdad. His fervent asceticism implicitly challenged the growing opulence of the Bagdad court, whilst his urging to his fellow Muslims to pursue a very individual path towards God challenged the religious elite but also discouraged orthodox obedience, religious and political. He was eventually arrested and imprisoned for nine years. Finally put on trial, al-Hallaj was accused of blasphemy and of "claims to [. . .] substantial union with God" (Massignon, "al-Halladj" 102). Politically "feared for influence on the people as well as on the members of the court," he was presented "as an agitator and a rebel who was a threat to the order of the Community" (102). Found guilty, al-Hallaj was cruelly put to death: he was first flogged (an estimated 500 lashes), his feet and hands were cut off; he was then "exhibited on a gibbet, still alive," stoned by the crowd, and left there over night. The following morning he was decapitated, his arms and legs cut off, his trunk "soaked with oil and set fire to" and his ashes thrown into the Tigris (Massignon, La vie de Hallâj 33).

The Sufi path to self-realization through divine knowledge is mirrored in Zahra's journey from a false existence to attempts to find her "true" self. In addition

to the structural parallels between Zahra's and a Sufi's journey there are numerous allusions in the novels to Sufis and Sufi quests. Viewed within such a narrative structure, Muhammed Ahmed's life, as recounted in L'enfant de sable, constitutes an "unenlightened" existence, that period of ignorant suffering which runs like a necessary motif through the lives of most mystics – the phase against which enlightment can be contrasted. It is also a description of a constrained existence precisely because of its falseness. There are in L'enfant de sable already a number of hints at Muhammed's mystical penchants. He mentions, for example, that one of his passions is "la fréquentation de quelques poètes mystiques" (L'enfant de sable 104); Fatima, his "wife," also spends her time reading "des livres de mystiques" (77). In a letter he composes to himself (a consequence of his "split" being brought about by the forced gender confusion) Muhammed concludes with a passage by the Egyptian mystic Ibn al-Farid, a renowned Sufi poet (92).[29]

Elsewhere, Amar, a story-teller who recounts one of the three possible endings to Muhammed/Zahra's story, associates himself, and his religious expression, with Islam's mystical traditions: "J'ai eu envie de leur dire: l'Islam que je porte en moi est introuvable, je suis un homme seul et la

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[29] Born in Cairo in 1182, Ibn al-Farid's poems became "the mainstays of Sufi interpretation and performance" (Ernst 155), and he was, and continues to be, attacked by the religious orthodoxy (156).

religion ne m'intérèsse pas vraiment. Mais leur parler d'Ibn 'Arabi[30] ou d'El-Hallaj aurait pu me valoir des ennuis" (L'enfant de sable 146). An anonymous story-teller, who provides a coda of sorts at the end of L'enfant de sable tells his audience: "je me suis dépouillé de tout et j'ai suivi la caravane à pied. J'ai tout abandonné. Je me suis vêtu de laine et j'ai pris le chemin du Sud sans me retourner" (207) – a quintessential Sufi portrait: asceticism, woolen garments, and the journey.

In addition, there are numerous mystical allusions in L'enfant de sable. For example, there are countless references to light and shadow, and, associated with the image of the shadow, the mystical notion that earthly existence is but a mask, an illusion, a shadow of our true existence. These suggestions lead to a number of metaphysical questions posed by various characters throughout the novel. "N'est-ce pas le temps du mensonge, de la mystification?," Muhammed asks his father; "Suis-je un être, ou une image, un corps ou une autorité, une pierre dans un jardin fané ou un arbre rigide? Dis-moi, qui suis-je?" (L'enfant de sable 50). And later, it is said of him that "Ce qu'il cherchait, c'était que lui-même se perdît de

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[30] Born in Spain in 1165 Ibn 'Arabi "is probably the most influential author of works on Sufism in Islamic history" (Chittick 49). "For most of the Sufis after the thirteenth century," writes Schimmel, "his writings constitute the apex of mystical theories, and the orthodox have never ceased attacking him" (Mystical Dimensions of Islam 263).

vue de manière définitive" (151). At the very beginning of the novel, Muhammed quotes "an Egyptian poet" (Ibn al-Farid?) who justified the writing of a journal in the following manner: "'De si loin que l'on revienne, ce n'est jamais que de soi-même. Un journal est parfois nécessaire pour dire que l'on a cessé d'être.' Son dessein était exactement cela," comments the narrator on Muhammed's own journal writing, "dire ce qu'il avait cessé d'être" (11-12). This idea of loss of self is an integral aspect of Sufi thought.[31]

Zahra's journey in La nuit sacrée is clearly foreshadowed then in L'enfant de sable. But for her true journey to begin she must be released in some way from the false existence she has been forced to lead. Zahra's release comes, and her mystical journey begins, with her father's death: "Il m'était difficile de ne pas établir la

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[31] Titus Burckhardt writes that: "God can only be known [. . .] when the human ego, which instinctively regards itself as a self-sufficient center – a kind of 'divinity' in addition to God – is extinguished before the infinitude of God, in accordance with the words: 'There is no divinity but God.' This does not mean that the immortal essence of the soul has to be annihilated; what must be dissolved is the web-like substance of the soul, made up of egoistic passions and imaginings, which restrict consciousness to the level of ephemeral appearances. When this 'veil' of selfishness is lifted from the underlying Spirit of Intellect – the supra-individuality of direct knowledge – things are seen as they really are. God is seen in his all-embracing Presence and the creature as pure possibility contained within the Divine Being" (Fez: City of Islam 129-130).

coïncidence," Zahra says, "entre ce veillard qui venait enfin de se retirer de la vie et cette clarté presque surnaturelle qui inonda les êtres et les choses" (La nuit sacrée 33). Liberated from the false masculine identity her father had forced upon her, she is free to begin her quest for her true self.

In the cemetery where her father is buried, Zahra experiences a vision[32] in which she is whisked away in "an intense light" by a man on a white horse. He takes her to a village of children in a small valley which exists outside of time: "Ils vivaient là en autarcie, loin de la ville, loin des routes, loin du pays lui-même. Une organisation parfaite, sans hiérarchie, sans police ni armée. Pas de lois écrites. C'était une véritable petite république rêvée et vécue par des enfants" (La nuit sacrée 41). In this newly discovered paradise – in which she felt "un sentiment profond d'une concordance entre une image et son reflet, entre un corps et son ombre" (42) – Zahra frees herself of her restrictive clothing and is purified by spring waters: "Mon corps se libérait de lui-même," she exclaims, "Des cordes et des ficelles se dénouaient peu à peu" (44). Zahra's purification is a washing away of her former,

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[32] "Ibn 'Arabi relates innumerable inward experiences and visions that helped determine the course of his life and the nature of his teachings" (Chittick 51).

masculine, socially, patriarchally-enforced identity.[33] In its place is asserted her new, feminine, body and identity: "j'étais la vie, le plaisir, le désir" she exalts under the waters of the spring, "Mon corps qui était une image plate, déserté, dévasté, accaparé par l'apparence et le mensonge, rejoignait la vie" (46). If her father's death represents the first stage of Zahra's journey, her purification and her new-found delight in her body is the second: "'Je suis heureux que tu aies trouvé la source,'" her "abductor" tells her, "'L'eau de cette source est bénéfique. Elle fait des miracles. Tu l'as trouvée seule. Tu es sur le chemin'" (47).

However allusively mystical the cleansing image may be, this "purification" also forges a path to a sexual awareness that in its corporeality competes with the spiritual quest. This is how Zahra describes a walk through the village: "Je passais mes mains sur mes petits seins. Cela me faisait plaisir. Je les massais dans l'espoir de les voir grossir, sortir de leur trou, pointer avec fierté et exciter les passants" (44). Later, the wind "caressed" her breasts and her "pointes durcissaient" (45). If this sexualization of the new Zahra was not obvious enough, the chapter is

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[33] "To follow Sufism is to die gradually to oneself and to become one-self, to be born anew and to become aware of what one has always been from eternity without one's having realized it until the necessary transformation has come about. It means to glide out of one's own mould like a snake peeling off its skin" (Nasr, Sufi Essays 17).

entitled, and the valley referred to as, "le jardin parfumé," the name of the Arab world's most famous sexual manual, written in the 15th century by Nefzawi. A very uninhibited text, The Perfumed Garden was written as a sexual guide for young people, presenting all matters sexual in a clear, straightforward, almost clinical style. Nefzawi said there was more shame in ignorance of God's work than there was in discussing the body and sexuality in an open manner – a radical break with traditional Islamic (moral) practice (Chebel, Encyclopédie de l'amour 445). The very space, then, which provides Zahra with her first step towards self-realization is explicitly sexual.

Eventually evicted from this paradise, Zahra feels separated and estranged from the world around her. She decides to abandon all of her worldy possessions and buries her past self – "une époque de mensonges et de faux-semblants" (57) – in her father's grave and sets out on a journey "du chemin qui s'ouvrait à moi" (58). Her trials, however, are far from over. Almost as soon as Zahra sets out she is followed and raped. She accepts this suffering, however, with a strange calmness, and the incident paradoxically places her upon the path of truth. The following morning she goes to a hamman to cleanse herself and there meets "la Femme Assise" who invites her into her home and introduces Zahra to her brother, the Consul. The stage is set for the next phase of her sexual, amorous and mystical growth.

Blind,[34] the Consul is a saint-like figure with whom Zahra soon establishes both an intellectual and a sexual relationship. Together they discuss Islam and the Qur'an at length; they both appreciate the text as they would "une poésie superbe" and condemn those who "l'exploitent en parasites et qui limitent la liberté de la pensée" (La nuit sacrée 79). It is during one of their discussions that Zahra likens herself to al-Hallaj: "j'ai renoncé," she says, "je suis une renoncée dans le sens mystique, un peu comme al-Hallaj" (83). Sexually the relationship between Zahra and the Consul is consummated in a brothel with Zahra posing as one of the employees to her blind partner: "Mon manque total d'expérience était pallié par l'absence de pudeur ou de gêne," Zahra effuses, "Le désir dirigeait instinctivement mon corps et lui dictait les mouvements appropriés. J'étais devenue folle. Je découvrais le plaisir pour la première fois de ma vie dans un bordel avec un aveugle!" (126). It is in this setting that Zahra finds an inner peace rooted in the affirmation of her sexual identity. Her peace is quickly disrupted, however, by the Seated Woman's rage and jealousy over the loss of her own incestuous relationship with the Consul.

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[34] "[Blindness] is a common [Sufi] motif, for it was felt that physical blindness enables a person to see the Divine Beloved all the better, especially because, as it was later believed, the eye is no longer a veil between the person looking and the one being looked at" (Schimmel, My Soul is a Woman 38).

The Seated Woman discovers Zahra's "secret past" and denounces her. One of Zahra's embittered uncles appears and accuses her of having killed her parents and of having stolen her father's fortune. Trapped, and seeking justice for all those women who had suffered at the hands of her uncle's "boundless hatred," Zahra kills him. She is sentenced to fifteen years in prison, which Zahra again accepts with a surprising calm: "Je ne considérais pas l'enfermement comme une punition," she says (143). Rather, her incarcerated existence seems to her to be a purer expression of the true state of the world: a world of false appearances and simulations. In addition, her imprisonment allows her to retreat, to separate herself from that world of illusion: "Je vivais les yeux fermés. [. . .] Je m'étais bandé les yeux pour plus de sûreté. Non seulement il n'y avait rien à voir dans ce lieu sordide, mais c'était ma façon d'être proche du Consul. J'essayais d'entrer dans ses ténèbres, espérant le rencontrer, le toucher et lui parler" (144).[35] Her desired union with the Consul acquires a transcendent nature, as evidenced in a letter she writes to him:

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[35] Schimmel quotes the following poem written by an early Syrian female sufi, Rabi'a ash-Shamiya: "A Beloved unlike all others:/He alone has touched my heart./And although absent from sight and touch,/He is ever present in my heart" (Schimmel, My Soul is a Woman 38).

> "Nous sommes, vous et moi, du même rêve comme d'autres sont du même pays [. . .]. Comme l'écho d'un chant matinal, votre voix se penche sur moi et m'accompagne dans ma marche. [. . .] Pour notre amitié – vous dites amour, vous –, je ne fais aucune prière. Elle est hors des mots. C'est une plante aux feuilles larges plantée dans ma conscience et dans mon cœur. [. . .] Le temps dans lequel je marche est un désert [. . .]. Je porte d'épaisses chaussettes de laine et des sandales de nomade." (153)

Once again, however, her new-found peace is short-lived: in prison her "sisters" appear, attack her and subject her to the cliterodectomy previously discussed. For them Zahra's very Being declares her Truth and that heretical "Truth," is Mra'l-Haqq, "Woman is the Truth;" or, to put it another way: her Ana'l-Haqq is a sexually independent, actively resistant Female "I". As Massignon describes al-Hallaj's Ana'l-Haqq as an "I" which is indivisible from God, so Zahra's "I" is one which cannot be separated from her female sexual identity. Her punishment, therefore, is quite logically a gendered, sexualized one – the cliterodectomy, the extremely violent nature of which echoes the violence inflicted upon al-Hallaj's body.

After this violation Zahra's "nocturnal wanderings," as she describes her visions, become more frequent and intense. In an exchange with a physician, charged with treating her,

Zahra explains that "une grande douleur me procure une lucidité au seuil de la voyance!" (165). Zahra retreats even further from the world and she appears ephemeral, much like a saint – blessing the wombs of sterile women who come to her for assistance.

When she is at last released from prison she immediately travels south in search of the Consul, with whom she has lost contact. It is there, by the sea that she achieves her desired Union at last. Walking alone on the deserted beach she is visited by a vision of a white house that she enters, and in this simple unfurnished place she finds a solitary figure:

> Seule une vielle dame priait. Je m'approchai d'elle et la dévisageai. [. . .] Ses doigts égrenaient un chapelet; ses lèvres bougaient à peine. Nos deux regards se croisèrent, puis, après un moment, elle se pencha vers moi et me dit tout en continuant d'égrener son chapelet:
>
> – Enfin, te voila !
>
> C'était bien elle ! L'Assise ! [. . .]
>
> J'eus un moment de recul, puis, sans réfléchir, je dis:
>
> – Oui, me voilà!
>
> J'étais sous l'emprise de quelque magie [. . .].
>
> Tout devenait clair dans mon esprit. Je pensais qu'entre la vie et la mort il n'y avait

qu'une très mince couche faite de brume ou de ténèbres, que le mensonge tissait ses fils entre la réalité et l'apparence, le temps n'étant qu'une illusion de nos angoisses. [. . .]

Quand je fus face au Saint, je m'agenouillai, je pris sa main tendue et, au lieu de la baiser, je la léchai, suçant chacun de ses doigts. Le Saint essaya de la retirer mais je la retenais de mes deux mains. L'homme était troublé. Je me levai et lui dis à l'oreille:

– Cela fait très longtemps qu'un homme ne m'a pas caressé le visage. Allez-y, regardez-moi avec vos doigts, doucement, avec la paume de votre main.

Il se pencha sur moi et dit:

– Enfin, vous voilà ! (187-189)

This passage contains almost all of the elements of an archetypal Sufi experience of transcendental Divine Union. In Zahra's character we have an attempt to reach across the chasm that exists between men and women through the mystical tradition which has long occupied a central place in Moroccan Maghrebi culture. "The spiritual high points of Maghribi culture," writes Burckhardt, "are to be found in the realm of Islamic mysticism" (Fez 129). It seems to me that it is Zahra's hope that the poetry of her past Sufi masters – al-Hallaj, Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn al-Farid – will function like the third language described by Malek Chebel

who speaks of "l'amour poétique" which became "la troisième langue commune des Arabes et des Persans après la langue de l'islam et la langue scientifique" in the 13th century (Encyclopédie de l'amour 18). This third language would transcend the differences between men and women, politics and religion, Islam and Christianity, French and Arabic. In fact, references to these three Sufi poets appear throughout Ben Jelloun's œuvre.

In La prière de l'absent, for example, it is said of Ahmad, one of the principal characters, that he "se réclamait de l'esprit et de l'âme de l'Andalou Ibn 'Arabi et d'Al Hallaj. Sans aller jusqu'à faire sienne la phrase téméraire du grand prédicateur errant qui fut supplicié à Bagdad en l'an 922, Ana'l-Haqq (Je suis la Vérité), il disait Ana'l-Shak (Je suis le Doute)" (81). Because of this young man's troubling tendencies, an old cheikh comes to talk to Ahmad's father:

> Comme tu sais, Si Suleiman, notre enseignement est basé sur l'Islam. C'est notre culture et notre identité. Les Chrétiens le savent, c'est d'ici qu'est parti le mouvement pour l'indépendance. Or ton fils déraisonne. Il perturbe les cours et remet en question la parole du maître. En plus, ses références sont dangereuses: les mystiques ont de tout temps détourné l'esprit de notre religion. Il cite Al Hallaj, Hasan Basri, Ghazâli, Ibn

> 'Arabi et des poètes scandaleux comme le voyou Abû Nawâss! (81)

Ahmad remains steadfast, however: "Ma prière est un chant emprunté à un vieil ami qui eut l'audace de se confondre avec la Vérité. Il fut jeté en prison, torturé, occis, mis en croix, décapité et enfin brulé à Bagdad en l'an 922. Ses cendres furent jetées dans le Tigre, mais sa voix ne cesse de traverser les siècles et les déserts pour venir habiter des cœurs impatients, des corps ravagés par l'Amour de la Verité et du Sublime" (194). In a more recent novel, La nuit de l'erreur, the novel's protagonist, Zina, says:

> Il y a des secrets graves et difficiles à garder éternellement. Si seulement j'avais rencontré une âme qui fût capable de les partager et de les comprendre... Voilà pourquoi il m'arrive souvent de faire cette prière dite par Ibn 'Arabi, Shaykh al-Akbar, le grand maître soufi, celui qui a compris l'islam et le message du Prophète mieux que quiconque. Mais sa fréquentation m'a conduite à la solitude et au renoncement. (277)

Despite this obvious identification with Islam's mystical tradition, Ben Jelloun's novels contain its negation – the stereotype, which erases the very hope the mystical content seems to offer. So fiercely portrayed, and so vigorously endowed are the stereotypes that, however much Ben Jelloun seeks to equip Zahra against them, he fails to carve out a space outside the stereotype of an inherently

repressive Islam, or other than a victimized, sexualized womanhood. In his portrayal of a woman's mystical quest, the woman is reduced to longing for sexual union only.

Zahra's union with the Consul, therefore, falls short of achieving the kind of transcendence sought by mystics. For them the body is a means of achieving spiritual and ethical perfection. But in Zahra's case, the body becomes the site of fulfillment. That Zahra's journey ends on the same site of sexuality where it began is emphasized by Zahra's sucking of the Consul's fingers when they at last meet, whereas all the other supplicants simply kiss his hand. The truth of the self she attains at the end of her journey is anchored at once in her female sexual identity and the disavowal, repression and abuse of that core of the self. If she lives beyond the rape and the cliterodectomy and in one sense overcomes these sufferings, her visionary and spiritual reflections return her only to expressions of sexual desire.

The sexualization of Zahra's mystical journey presents a double problematic. Although it is, in some respects, a logical exploration of what has always been represented as a highly charged erotic and amorous encounter (that is, Sufism's encounter with God), the literalization of that relationship and its transposition to a human relationship evacuates it of its original purport: transcendence. To further complicate matters, this sexualization takes place within a heavily stereotyped space, as we have observed,

which functions much like an ideological black hole sucking up all subtleties within its orbit. Zahra's journey becomes embroiled in the constraints of the reality of her gender identity. The challenges she encounters issue from narrow and orthodox definitions which, as we have seen, are coupled with representations of depraved sexuality. It is this sexualization of her quest for identity that ultimately overpowers the mystical overtones of the novel. It is not that the Sufi tradition denies the body by any means. For a Sufi, the body is not something that must be overcome as is the case in Christian mysticism; on the contrary, sexuality is often articulated as a site of mystical union. It is not the presence of sex in Ben Jelloun's mysticism that is problematic but rather the fact that, in his writing, that representation devolves into stereotypes and becomes reductionist. In this sense, a potential force within Islam with its history of resistance to orthodoxy is transformed into yet another means of female enslavement.

Seen from the point of view of the reception of La nuit sacrée, these ambivalences become quite apparent. If the critics note the mystical dimensions of the novel, they fail to identify them as integral to its overall vision. Marc Gontard, for instance, one of France's foremost critics of Moroccan literature, acknowledges the novel's reference to mystical poets, but simply observes that the Consul cites "plutôt les poètes mystiques, Al-Ma'arrî, tout

particulièrement" (42).[36] For Gontard, Zahra's quest is a generically ontological one and the cultural specificity of that search is erased: "La nuit sacrée reste un roman de l'étrangeté qui pose d'une manière remarquable le problème de l'être, c'est-à-dire celui de l'identité" (46).

Moroccan critics have not necessarily been exempt from failing to see the mystical intention of Ben Jelloun's novels. Witness Muhammad Boughali's dismissal of Ben Jelloun's writing, reducing it to nothing more than pandering to the exotic tastes of a French audience:

> Je ne parle donc en mon nom propre afin me revienne, à moi seul, toute la responsabilité d'une initiative qui consiste à dénoncer ce qui se

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[36] Which is not entirely accurate: it is Zahra who first encounters the poetry of al-Ma'arri when she arrives at the "secret" village to which she is transported by her veiled rider: "Il fallait à chaque fois dire le mot de passe, lequel était composé de quatre phrases, le tout était un poème [. . .]. Je ne reconnus pas tout de suite la poésie d'Abû-l-Alâ al-Ma'arrî," continues Zahra, "J'avais lu durant mon adolescence Risalat al-Ghufran [Letter of Forgiveness] (La nuit sacrée 40-41). Al-Ma'ari (973-1058) was a blind Syrian writer and poet, whose poetry contained a great deal of irony and derision and was, therefore, as contentious as the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn al-Farid. In Risalat al-Ghufran al-Ma'arrî imagines a traditionalist and grammarian, Ibn al-Karih, to have died and "after an uneasy reckoning at the Day of Resurrection, to have passed the entrance to the Gardens of Paradise" (Smoor 927-935).

dit du Maroc et des Arabes[37] sous les couverts forts commodes d'une écriture dite téméraire. Il est temps, me semble-t-il, de reprendre ses écrits

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[37] One might note that this "blindness" to the obvious presence of Berber culture in Morocco, as well as in Ben Jelloun's writings, is more likely to be found in Moroccan commentary than elsewhere. In Boughali's case the omission is systematic. During the course of his critique of Ben Jelloun's work he refers constantly to the (in his mind, false) representation of "Arabes," of "la culture arabe," and of "notre arabité," not once acknowledging the extent to which Ben Jelloun's narratives and images are informed by Morocco's Berber culture. In his chapter entitled "L'Espace d'un Visage," he undertakes an analysis of the practice of tattooing in Morocco. This is a distinctly Berber practice and yet Boughali manages to not once refer to the Berber people or culture. The chapter's objective is to condemn the practice of tattooing women for it is unIslamic and participates in the subjugation of Moroccan women: "C'est dans cette perspective que les tatouages du visage chez la femme seront pris en considération comme un véritable paradigme de violence et de réduction qu'imposent diversement les hommes à la féminité" (105). He wishes to articulate Islam's reasons for objecting to these traditions and to "en faire apprécier la haute teneur humaine qui s'inscrit dans une vaste défense de la féminité" (106). The racist implications become increasingly overt when he later writes that "tout se passe alors dans cette affaire [of facial tattooing] comme s'il s'agissait à la fois de signaler et de signer littéralement la mise sous tutelle de la femme sous un prétexte fabriqué de toutes pièces. Il serait difficile ici de ne pas penser à un véritable complot contre elle sous couverture de moralité suspecte ou d'infériorité essentielle" (111, emphasis mine). Eventually, he distils Moroccan culture to an Arab essence: "la force de la commande d'amusement exotique dont [Ben Jelloun] se croit chargé comme une mission sacrée," Boughali writes, "l'aveugle sur les vérités fondamentales de la société marocaine et sur les composantes essentielle de l'arabité" (142).

> les plus connus afin de les soumettre à une analyse froide qui consiste à le dénoncer lucidement comme un amuseur exotique. En effet, Ben Jelloun a, dès le début, pris à la fois l'initiative et l'engagement solonnelle d'amuser les Français [. . .]. (123)

A far more subtle critic is Rachida Saigh Bousta who recently established the Centre de Recherches sur les Cultures Maghrebines at the University of Marrakech in Morocco. Although she hints at the mystical elements in La nuit sacrée, her interest lies elsewhere: her analysis is alternatingly semiotic and psychoanalytic: "L'intérêt d['une lecture pluridisciplinaire] s'oriente essentiellement vers la poétique de l'écriture romanesque dans ses manifestations fontionnelles tout en étant très sensible aux rapports de la narratologie, de la psychanalyse, de la sémiotique, entre autres, quant au déchiffrement des processus discursifs et scriptuaires" (10-11). Zahra's journey is therefore interpreted as one between different levels of signification, simulation and fabulation: "Zahra est-elle alors le produit d'une illusion, la parabole d'un rêve, ou une étrange vérité? Le récit," concludes Saigh Bousta, "demeure à cheval entre le vraisemblance et l'impossible" (129). Zahra's actions are seen through the filter of "the father." Her "chivalrous abductor," her "consensûal" rape in the forest, and her relationship with the Consul are

understood as complex repetitions or reconfigurations of her troubled relationship with her father.

Saigh Bousta does mention that La nuit sacrée "se termine entre l'Enfer et la sainteté, qui posent d'autres problèmes de cohérence quant au devenir de Zahra, victime de malédiction mais aussi parée d'une espèce de profil mystique sublime" (131). For her, however, these aspects fall under the rubric of "the imaginary," as "le monde merveilleux des contes," or "un monde aléatoire, voire même à certains égards surnaturel."

Abdallah Memmes, a Professor at the University Muhammad V in Rabat, is one of the few critics to find resonances of mysticism in Ben Jelloun's works, as well as other writers from the Maghreb:

> Ainsi, la similitude, à cet égard, entre la démarche mystique et celle de nos auteurs n'est pas seulement d'ordre formelle, mais a trait au sens même du déplacement, conçu comme une quête initiatique devant déboucher sur une certaine idée de l'accomplissement de soi. En effet, si pour les Soufis, le voyage et l'errance constituent un moyen privilégié pour rencontrer l'Autre, "l'alter ego divin" de leur être, et conquérir ainsi leur "complétude" et leur "identité totale," pour les écrivains maghrébins, le voyage, si réel soit-il, n'est en fait qu'une mise en fiction pour souligner la nécessité de sortir du cadre de la

> stricte altérité, et proposer une conception élargie de la notion de l'identité qui englobe l'Autre en nous, c'est-à-dire la différence. (193)

Ben Jelloun's attempt to replicate this quest in his fiction is an expression of his desire for a dialogue, with both the French and his fellow Moroccans. The representation of the quest forms a complex node of conflicting desires. It is, on the one hand, a response to a repressive Islam: valorizing the possibility of a quest for self-fulfillment in the face of oppressive injunctions, Ben Jelloun strives to engage Moroccans in critical self-examination. This venture is also a turning towards that which he finds beautiful in his cultural heritage. As such it is like an olive branch of compromise and reconciliation after his angry denunciations. But it also offers the possibility of escape, and it is at this point that the desired points of convergence seem to diverge, for that escape represents a turning away from dialogue and from engagement with the other – French or Moroccan.

Just as Ben Jelloun felt trapped in 1984 by the role assigned to him by the media, so his novels considered in this chapter are caught within, and filtered through, a broader cultural discourse regarding fundamentalism, Islam, women, and the Arab world. Written by a Moroccan and

focalized through a woman[38] these novels allow readers to have all of their assumptions about Arabs and Islam guiltlessly confirmed, and their occidental values comfortably affirmed in the process. That is, although the works studied here are works of fiction, the point is that, regardless of whatever intent Ben Jelloun may have had, there is no doubt that fiction can be, and is, read through any number of cultural filters. The problem faced by Ben Jelloun and other contemporary postcolonial writers who offer a critique of their culture is one of establishing a voice capable of counteracting the stereotypes. The dialogue Ben Jelloun and others hope to establish also depends on the participation of interlocuters in the West willing to adopt a critical gaze inward. In the absence of such a climate, Ben Jelloun risks being read as a

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[38] An important detail. Rosemary Sayigh writes that "almost from the beginning of their cultural appropriation of the Arab/Muslim world, Europeans focused on women as a central, summarizing symbol of a society that was alien and challenging to them" (258). "Along with the 'lazy-irrational-libidinous' theme," she continues, the "oppressed Arab woman" theme was, and still is, an element in the justification of intervention. [. . .] French public opinion has continued to react sensitively to this topic – witness the number of books and articles that appeared during the Algerian war, and after it, pointing to the continuing exclusion of Algerian women from public life" (259). A more recent example has been the emphasis in the media, to the virtual exclusion of all other issues, on the status of women in its coverage of the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan in the fall of 1996.

confirmation of Western stereotypes of the North African and viewed by Moroccans as a traitor to his own culture.

Ben Jelloun's response to all this potential, to his own "nuit sacrée," is torn between wonder and anger. Wonder at the mystical beauty he sees at the heart of Islam; anger at those who violate that potential. If that current violation is a troubled reponse to modernity, then Ben Jelloun's anger is a response to a response. That is, there is something debilitatingly reactive about the voice in Ben Jelloun's fiction. If a conservative Islam's response is a harking back to past ideals, Ben Jelloun's reply is a retreat to a mystical plane even he believes is unattainable. Ben Jelloun's status is much like Zahra's at the end of La nuit sacrée – he can only dream of a cultural union for it cannot take place in reality. Shortly before her "transportation" to the Consul's side, Zahra states: "mon corps s'était arrêté dans son évolution; [. . .] ni un corps de femme plein et avide, ni un corps d'homme serein et fort; j'étais entre les deux, c'est-à-dire en enfer" (178). Is not this image of hell as being "entre les deux" an apt description of the cultural position Ben Jelloun has carved out for himself?

Fatima Mernissi: An Imagined Future Through an Idealized Past

I would like to begin this chapter with a personal reflection on a scene of transformation I witnessed on the evening of February 3, 1997 in Rabat. The highly paradoxical nature of what I observed describes well some of the tensions I will discuss in Mernissi's works.

I was sharing the ftour, the meal which breaks the fast during Ramadan, at a friend's (El-Heshmi) when three young girls, in their mid- to late-teens, dropped by. All three were traditionally and conservatively dressed, wearing modest djellabas[39] and scarves. They joined us at the table, nibbled on the food, and chatted with El-Heshmi. But then all three rose and disappeared into El-Heshmi's bathroom. Half an hour later they emerged completely

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[39] "La jellaba est un vêtement d'homme très ancien, de laine de serge ou de drap, que les femmes ont adopté autour des années 30 [. . .]. Comme tout le reste elle a beaucoup évolué, le capuchon a rapetissé comme on renonçait au voile [. . .]. C'est surtout un vêtement pratique qui habille au sens fort du terme à peu de frais, qu'on endosse facilement et qui s'est imposé pour sa commodité, la liberté qu'il permet, son adéquation à un mode de vie où le public et le privé sont distincts. Contrairement au caftan [. . .] on la met volontiers chez soi, pour allier au confort l'élégance du long. La jellaba correspond à un certain niveau d'émancipation où l'on obéit à plusieurs cultures à la fois, et où l'on use de la tradition, sans forcément s'abriter derrière les conventions" (Tazi 221).

transformed: no longer were they the discreet, proper, young Muslim girls who had shown up on his doorstep; they were now three very sexualized and flirtatious young women, sporting tight, short skirts, tight blouses, tight leather pants, lipstick, eye-liner, extended eye-brows and high-heel shoes. In their new appearance, the young women exuded a sense of sexuality and coveted El-Heshmi's attention. Eventually the time came for them to head off into the night – strolling up and down Boulevard Muhammad V perhaps. During Ramadan, this main grand boulevard in central Rabat was even more full than usual of people walking, chatting, shopping, enjoying coffees, teas, pastries, and cruising.

Wherever it was the young women were headed, they left with their djellabas safely tucked away for later use: El-Heshmi explained that changing at his place was necessary because they would never be allowed to dress like that at home and could not possibly be seen walking around their neighbourhood like "that." So, quite sensibly, they left home plainly dressed and returned home, plainly dressed – but in the interval ...

The spatial binary of inside/outside has underwritten Islamic and Moroccan gender identity and relations. Mernissi's œuvre over the past twenty five years has engaged with this problematic and has been an attempt to shift the ground on which gender has operated in Moroccan culture and society. As we shall see, Mernissi will valorize certain moments in the early days of the formation of the Islamic

community in order to recover a space apparently free of binary gender relations. But her revisionist histories become entangled in contradictions steeped in both the uneasy juxtapositions of tradition and modernity and inconsistencies in her own logic.

Her first significant publication was Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society[40] published in 1975 but originally written between 1970-73 as a PhD thesis in sociology[41] at an American university and, until the publication of Dreams of Trespass in 1994, it was the most widely read and translated of her works.[42] In Beyond the Veil, Mernissi lays out and explores almost all of the themes which will resurface time and again over the following twenty-five years of writing – women and space, women's rights, and their inseparable ties to the broader issues of democracy and modernity. This work also reflects her desire to balance sociological data with the more informal, but for Mernissi equally important, unheard words and voices of those Moroccan women who are illiterate and are therefore barred from writing. Beyond the Veil represents well the dual nature of her work. Divided into

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[40] Both Beyond the Veil and Dreams of Trespass were written and originally published in English.

[41] Sexe, idéologie et Islam, the French translation of Beyond the Veil, 3.

[42] Beyond the Veil, xvi.

two distinct parts, the first is an examination of "a theoretical model of the traditional Muslim concept of female sexuality" and gender relations (89), whereas the second juxtaposes this "ideal" paradigm with the reality of contemporary gender relations in Morocco through an analysis of data gathered in interviews as well as from "letters from a religious counselling service on Moroccan state television which receives hundreds of letters every day from citizens with problems" (90).

For the "ideal" paradigm Mernissi turns to a work by Imam Ghazali, The Revivification of Religious Sciences, written in the 12th century, which in her view "gives a detailed description of how Islam integrated the sexual instinct in the social order and placed it at the service of God" (28). Mernissi also chooses Ghazali's work because it "epitomizes" the "implicit theory" of female sexuality which lies deeply buried in the Muslim unconscious (32). The "explicit theory" of female sexuality is the "belief that men are aggressive in their interaction with women, and women are passive" (32). The implicit theory of female sexuality, on the other hand, "as seen in Imam Ghazali's interpretation of the Koran, casts woman as the hunter and the man as the passive victim" (33). Such an understanding of female sexuality can lead to the belief that it is the husband's duty to ensure that his wife remains sexually satisfied within the marriage. In Ghazali's treatise, this satisfaction must address both quantity and quality. As

Mernissi points out, Ghazali "cautiously ventures that the man should have intercourse with the woman as often as he can, once every four nights if he has four wives" (40). She also notes that "Ghazali recommends foreplay, primarily in the interest of the woman, as a duty for the believer" (40). Ghazali links fulfillment of female desire to their ability to maintain their virtue. Women's virtue in turn solidifies social stuctures: "social order is secured when the woman limits herself to her husband and does not create fitna, or chaos, by enticing other men to illicit intercourse" (39). In other words, lack of sexual fulfillment would lead women to disrupt smooth social functioning.[43] In addition, and possibly more significantly, men would be drawn away from what should be their primary role – devotion to God. Mernissi summarizes Ghazali's description of women and sexuality in the following way:

> Women are a dangerous distraction that must be used for the specific purpose of providing the Muslim nation with offspring and quenching the

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[43] Mernissi describes such a disruptive figure of Moroccan folk culture, "Aisha Kandisha, a repugnant female demon. She is repugnant precisely because she is libidinous. She has pendulous breasts and lips and her favourite pastime is to assault men in the streets and in dark places, to induce them to have sexual intercourse with her, and ultimately to penetrate their bodies and stay with them forever" (42). A Moroccan cd was recently released (July 2000) by a group who rather amusingly (and understatedly) call themselves "Aisha Kandisha's Jarring Effects."

> tensions of the sexual instinct. But in no way should women be an object of emotional investment or the focus of attention, which should be devoted to Allah alone in the form of knowledge-seeking, meditation, and prayer. (45)

An understanding of the distinctness of this Muslim perception of female sexuality is central to Mernissi's argument that unequal gender relations within Islam are not rooted in a belief in female inferiority (11), but rather in the fact that "the whole Muslim organization of social interaction and spacial configuration" is a response to "women's qaid power ['the power to deceive and defeat men, not by force, but by cunning and intrigue']. The social order," she argues, "then appears as an attempt to subjugate her power and neutralize its disruptive effects" (33).

Mernissi notes that both "Muslim and European theories come to the same conclusion: that women are destructive to the social order" (44), but they respond in quite different ways. In the Christian West, sex was vilified and measures were introduced to control it, whereas in the Muslim world what is attacked "is not sexuality but women, as the embodiment of destruction, the symbol of disorder" (44). Despite these differences, Mernissi concludes that:

> Ghazali's conception of the individual's task on earth is illuminating in that it reveals that the Muslim message, in spite of its beauty, considers humanity to be constituted by males only. Women

> are considered not only outside of humanity but a threat to it as well. Muslim wariness of heterosexual involvement is embodied in sexual segregation and its corollaries: arranged marriage, the important role of the mother in the son's life, and fragility of the marital bond (as revealed by the institutions of repudiation and polygamy). The entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defence against, the disruptive power of female sexuality. (45)

Mernissi asserts that this notion of the dangerous nature of female sexuality lay at the foundation of the Muslim community at the beginnings of Islam. Two key instruments (which remain in place in Morocco today) were introduced,[44] she argues, to institutionalize this control: polygamy and repudiation:

> The new social structure of Islam, which constituted a revolution in the mores of pre-Islamic Arabia, was based on male dominance. Polygamy, repudiation, the prohibition of zina [illicit intercourse], and the guarantees of paternity were all designed to foster the

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[44] "The right to polygamy and repudiation granted exclusively to males seems to have been an innovation in seventh-century Arabia. Historical evidence indicates that earlier marriage patterns had been more varied and less codified" (Beyond the Veil 50).

> transition from a family based on some degree of female self-determination to a family based on male control. The Prophet saw the establishment of a male-dominated Muslim family as crucial to the establishment of Islam. (64)

Provocatively, Mernissi argues that polygamy represents a "flaw in the Muslim theory of sexuality" (47) for Ghazali acknowledges that sexual desire is equal in men and women, but argues that polygamy is necessary to satisfactorily quench male sexual needs. "Since Islam assumes that a sexually frustrated individual is a very problematic believer and a troublesome citizen of the umma [Islamic community]," comments Mernissi, "the distrust of women, whose sexual frustration is organized institutionally, is even greater" (48). Furthermore, Mernissi asserts that polygamy provides a significant "reason for women's reluctant attitude towards Muslim order" (47). She finds textual evidence of this reluctance (and, indeed, resistance) in Islam's earliest days[45] when Islam "banished all practices in which the sexual self-determination of women was asserted" (67). She finds sources that indicate "some women opposed Islam because it jeopardized their position [which] was evidently more advantageous than the one Islam granted them" and point to the fact that "the

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[45] A history she devotes a full work to: Sultanes oubliées: Femmes chefs d'état en Islam.

opposition between these women and Islam was clearly grounded in the sexual field" (73).

Mernissi further links the establishment of gender roles in early Islam to the Prophet's personal experiences and responses:[46]

> The Prophet's own experience of the corrosive attraction of female sexuality underlies much of the Muslim attitude towards women and sexuality. Fear of succumbing to the temptation represented by women's sexual attraction – a fear experienced by the Prophet himself – accounts for many of the defensive reactions to women by Muslim society. [. . .] The Prophet's interactions with women, his intimate quarrels with his wives, his behaviour with the women he loved, are the basis for many

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[46] To say nothing of Allah's hand in all of this, which is described in a surprisingly casual tone by Mernissi: "The fact that despite His unequivocal orders to women, Allah decided to check on them by institutionalizing the waiting period [before a woman can remarry] shows that He did not expect them to obey the divine order. The expectation that women will not cooperate, that they will need to be coerced, explain's man's religious duty to control the women under his roof" (82). And elsewhere she writes that "To calm the scandalized clamour of the Prophet's contemporaries, the Muslim God made a lasting change in the institution of adoption. Verse four of the thirty-third sura [of the Qur'an] denied that adoption creates legal and relational ties between individuals" (57).

legal features of the Muslim family structure. (54)

Elsewhere in the text Mernissi softens her critique of the Prophet.[47] For example, she acknowledges that Muhammad's decisions were made in the face of a very particular set of circumstances[48] and in response to the demands of those around him. Nevertheless she clearly holds the Prophet responsible for the patriarchal structure which denies women the equality they deserve and is promised elsewhere in Islam's message. This critique of the Prophet's role in the establishment of gender inequity will give way in Mernissi's

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[47] "It should be noted here that the Muslim Prophet's heroism does not lie in any relation of aggression, conquest, or exercise of brute force against women, but on the contrary in his vulnerability. It is because he is vulnerable, and therefore, human, that his example has exerted such power over generations of believers. The Prophet was anything but macho in today's sense of behaving as a conqueror of women [. . .] the sole respectable role in the Muslim Meditterranean today" (Beyond the Veil 57).

[48] "It has been argued that many of Islam's institutions were a response to the new needs that emerged with the disintegration of tribal communalism, a means of absorbing the insecurity generated by such disintegration. Polygamy, for example, has been described as such an institution. The Prophet, concerned about the fate of women who were divorced, widowed or unmarried orphans, decided to create a kind of responsibility system whereby unattached women were resituated in a family unit in which a man could protect them, not just as kinsman, but as husband. The fact that polygamy was instituted by the Koran after the disaster of Uhud, a battle in which many Muslim males were slain, substantiates this theory" (Beyond the Veil 79-80).

later works to attempts at situating him and his lifetime in a golden era of gender relations in Islam.

In her subsequent writings, Mernissi turns to a brief period in early Islam in which men and women were viewed and treated equally in the newly formed Islamic community. This golden era lasted only ten years, from the hejira (the flight of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina which marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar), to Muhammad's death ten years later. During this period, in Mernissi's revisioning of Islam's history, Muhammad strove to establish equality between men and women in the new community. She points out in an interview:

> Moi, j'utilise une période historique: dix ans: 622-632. 622: c'est la date où le Prophète a été chassé de sa ville natale, La Mecque, à cause des idées qu'il prêchait et notamment l'idée d'égalité qui détruisait l'idéal de l'aristocratie tribale arabe, aristocratie qui prônait l'inégalité fondée sur l'esclavage et le racisme. Mohamed est venu et a nié ces valeurs. Votre esclave, votre femme est votre égal. [. . .] Entre 622 et 632, la première communauté musulmane s'est constituée et on venait chaque matin chez lui; c'était un Hakam, c'est à dire un arbitre. On lui posait des questions: "comment doit-on aimer, comment doit-on se marier, comment doit-on hériter?" [. . .] J'aime ce moment 622-632; j'aime cette idée d'une

> communauté d'êtres humains qui se bat et veut être plus heureuse. ("Avec Fatima Mernissi" 22)

In Le harem politique Mernissi describes this golden era in spatial terms – a pivotal concept in her writing:

> [. . .] on peut dire que l'architecture prophétique était un espace où la distance entre vie privée et vie publique était nulle, et où les seuils physiques ne constituaient guère des obstacles. C'était une architecture où le foyer débouchait de plein-pied sur la mosquée et allait ainsi jouer un rôle décisif dans la vie des femmes et leur rapport au politique. Cette osmose spatiale entre foyer et mosquée aura deux conséquences que l'Islam moderne officiel n'a pas cru bon de retenir ou n'a pas envisagées. La première est que cette équation entre privé et public va favoriser la formulation par les femmes de revendications politiques, notamment la contestation des privilèges masculins concernant l'héritage et le droit de porter des armes. La deuxième, qui découle de la première, c'est que le Hijab, qu'on nous présente comme émanant de la volonté prophétique, fut imposé par Omar B. Al-Khattab, porte-parole de la résistance masculine aux revendications des femmes. (144)

This articulation of the importance of spatial configurations first appears, like so many of her concerns,

in Beyond the Veil. In Part Two of the work, "Anomic Effects of Modernization on Male-Female Dynamics," Mernissi mentions that she began her inquiry into the current state of affairs between men and women in Morocco by "casually ask[ing] about fifty people (roughly half males and half females), 'What do you think is the main change that has taken place in the family and in women's situation in the last decade?'" (89). She found that "almost everyone [. . .] mentioned, at one point or another, sexual desegregation" (89).

For Mernissi, the issue of space, or more specifically, the spatial segregation of the sexes, is symbolic of the emotional, sexual, social and economic separation that exists between men and women in contemporary Moroccan society. But it is also the very source of the problem, not only of gender relations but, by extension, of the issues of human rights and the formation of democratic institutions:

> It is quite inconceivable for a human being who does not cherish democratic relations in a domain considered non-political, like the household (in which life's essential functions are enacted: eating, sleeping, love-making), to seek it in the high ground of democracy, the party cell or the parliamentary chamber. (Beyond the Veil 96)

It is for this reason that Mernissi explores the historical and textual origins of the physical separation of the sexes in detail in her work Le harem politique.

Mernissi opens Chapter Five of Le harem politique, "Le Hijab, le voile," by declaring that "Le Hijab, littéralement 'rideau', est 'descendu' non pour mettre une barrière entre un homme et une femme, mais entre deux hommes" (109). She argues that if you re-read the relevant Qur'anic sura (XXXIII)[49] carefully and pay equally close attention to the context in which the sura was first recited,[50] you can see that

> durant une période troublée du début de l'Islam, le Prophète profère un verset assez exceptionel et déterminant pour la religion musulmane qui introduit une rupture dans l'espace qu'on peut

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[49] "Ô vous qui croyez/N'entrez pas dans les appartements du Prophète/Sauf si vous y êtes autorisés à l'occasion d'une invitation pour un repas./Et dans ce cas-là, n'y entrez que lorsque le repas est prêt à être servi./Si vous êtes donc invité (à y prendre un repas) entrez-y, mais retirez-vous dès que vous avez terminé de manger, sans vous oublier dans des conversations familières. Un tel laisser-aller fait mal (yu'di) au Prophète qui a honte de vous le dire. Mais Dieu n'a pas honte de dire la vérité./Quand vous venez demander quelque chose (aux épouses du Prophète) faites-le derrière un Hijab. Cela est plus pur pour vos cœurs et pour les leurs." (Qoran, Sura 33, verse 53; trans. Mernissi)

[50] Fazlur Rahman writes that "the Qur'an and the genesis of the Islamic community occurred in the light of history and against a social-historical background. The Qur'an is a response to that situation, and for the most part it consists of moral, religious, and social pronouncements that respond to specific problems confronted in concrete historical situations" (Islam and Modernity 5).

> comprendre comme une séparation du public et du privé ou de profane et du sacré mais qui va s'orienter vers une ségrégation des sexes: ce voile qui descend du ciel va recouvrir la femme, la séparer de l'homme, du Prophète et donc de Dieu. (129)

For Mernissi, however, the intention of the verse is otherwise: "La 'descente du Hijab' est double dès le début, comprenant un niveau concret: le Prophète a tiré un rideau palpable entre lui et Anas B. Malik [who was overstaying his welcome on Muhammad's wedding night], et un niveau abstrait: la descente du verset, du ciel vers la terre, de Dieu au Prophète qui l'a récité" (127). Such textual re-readings of the Qur'an but especially of the Hadiths, sayings of the Prophet, form the core of her enterprise in Le harem politique.

Mernissi was so consistently confronted by the seemingly unanswerable Hadith – "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity" – every time she dared suggest that women had the right to participate in the affairs of state as full and equal citizens, that she decided that she had no choice but to fight fire with textual fire. Whether recited by her local grocer or a fellow scholar, the intention was always the same – to silence her, for "Qu'aurais-je pu dire qui puisse contrebalancer la force de cette aphorisme politique aussi implacable que populaire?" she asks in Le harem politique

(8). For Mernissi, such systemic exclusion of women from the social and political process is not simply unacceptable but constitutes, as we have already seen, a betrayal of Islamic faith. In the preface to the English translation of Le harem politique she writes: "if women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite" (The Veil and the Male Elite ix). Mernissi's desire to investigate the roots of those interests led her to the "textes religieux que tout le monde connait mais que personne ne sonde vraiment, si l'on excepte les autorités en la matière, Mollahs et Imams" (Le harem politique 9), to better understand and "éclairer le mystère de cette misogynie que doivent affronter les femmes musulmanes en 1986" (16).

The scope of such an inquiry is enough to intimidate all but the most determined; Mernissi's textual excavation included the thirteen volumes of Tabari's Tarikh ("History"), the thirty volumes of his Tafsir ("'Commentaire,' explication du Qoran"), and the Hadith collections of Bukhari and Nissaï (16). It is in the work of the ninth century scholar Bukhari that the "implacable" Hadith – "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity" – is to be found. According to Bukhari – whose work is so highly esteemed that the mere presence of a Hadith within his work makes it "vrai et

surtout inattaquable à priori, jusqu'à preuve du contraire" (66) – it was Abu Bakra, one of the Prophet's closest companions, who reportedly heard the Prophet pronounce the Hadith upon learning that "les Perses avaient nommé une femme pour les diriger" (66). Summoning forth the rigorously scientific tradition of Hadith collection and verification – which asserts that "le lecteur croyant a le droit d'avoir toute information pertinente sur la source du Hadith ou la chaîne de ses transmetteurs, afin qu'il juge à tout moment s'ils sont dignes ou non de foi" (49) – and undaunted by the authority of Bukhari's assertion, Mernissi insists on her right, as a Muslim woman, to ask: "Qui a dit ce Hadith, où, quand, à qui et pourquoi?" (66). I need not retrace all the steps of her inquiry which makes up chapter three, "Enquête sur un Hadith misogyne et sur son auteur, Abu Bakra," of Le harem politique, but it is valuable to note that Mernissi comes to the following conclusions: that Abu Bakra must have had a phenomenal memory because he remembered the Hadith twenty five years after the Prophet's death; that Abu Bakra recalled the Hadith at a very politically sensitive time in his career, that is, after the "Battle of the Camel" in which A'isha, the Prophet's wife, was defeated in her challenge to the right of the Caliph Ali to rule, during which Abu Bakra had not taken sides and therefore needed to dissociate himself from A'isha's actions; and, finally, that according to the tradition established for Hadith verification, Abu Bakra cannot be

accepted as a faithful transmitter of the Hadith, for it is recorded that he provided false testimony in a trial which came before the second Caliph, Umar (78-81). Moreover, Mernissi points out that the Hadith, although admitted by Bukhari into his collection of "authentic" Hadiths, was indeed "violemment contesté par beaucoup, contesté et débattu," both before and after its inclusion (81).

What is perhaps even more significant than Mernissi's findings which seek to undermine this most famous, and, for women, most paralyzing of Hadith, is her assertion of her absolute right to challenge that Hadith, and to engage in a textual analysis of her own.[51] This constitutes a radical act for it marks a clear challenge to the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis and endows her with the power to question the male-dominated discourse of Qur'anic interpretations. The assertion of her voice and her challenge to the male establishment becomes evident in what is perhaps the most bitter passage I have come across in her writing. In Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes she writes: "Notre patrimoine, tel que je l'ai vécu enfant, adolescente, adulte, est un

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[51] "In theoretical terms, Muslim jurists (though not the Shi'a) have adopted a highly skeptical view of the finality of their judgements; hence the readiness mutually to recognize views that may be contradictory. It is recognized – though this recognition is not shared by Islamist ideologues – that it is against natural justice and natural law (which accords with divine will) to foist ordinances of relevance to the seventh century upon the twentieth" (Al-Azmeh 12).

patrimoine obscurantiste et militant" (25). In the same work she lays bare her motivations and intentions: "Je voudrais [. . .] prendre la parole en tant que femme marocaine qui manipule l'écriture et l'analyse, deux instruments exclusivement masculins" (25). This textual practice permeates and propels all of her work. We have already seen how the consultation of some of Islam's earliest documents formed the foundation of her first work, Beyond the Veil, in which she calls into question the foundation of male power on the basis of examined textual sources:

> I have read the same Arab sources as [Salah Ahmad al-'Ali][52] has, and nowhere have I found clear information on the statistical frequency of these pre-Islamic marital practices or on the moral attitude of pre-Islamic society towards them. (Beyond the Veil 66)

From this analytical foundation she arrives at an erasure of female voice and authority in Islam: "According to my reading of the historical evidence, Islam banished all practices in which the sexual self-determination of women was asserted" (Beyond the Veil 66-67, emphasis added). A similar impetus is at work in Le harem politique: "À la fois

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[52] A modern Arab historian who argues that "'bedouin society was organized according to the patrimonial system in which the man had power and authority over the woman'" (Beyond the Veil 66).

ébahie, vaincue et furieuse, je ressentis tout à coup la nécessité impérieuse de me documenter sur ce Hadith, de rechercher les textes où il était mentionné, de mieux comprendre son étonnant pouvoir sur de modestes citoyens d'un État moderne" (8).[53]

Equally significant and emphasized in Le harem politique is her insistence upon Islam's rationalist tradition: "L'Islam était, du moins durant les premiers siècles, la religion de l'individu raisonnable, responsable, capable de voir le vrai du faux pour autant qu'il est bien outillé, c'est-à-dire qu'il possède des instruments de travail scientifiques, le recueils de Hadiths l'étant, précisement" (49). It is also true, however, that the interpretation and the manipulation of the Hadiths and of the Qur'an was, from the very beginning, an intensely political matter. Indeed, the very need for the Hadiths to be collected and verified rose out of the political turmoil that followed Muhammad's death as the new Muslim community drifted towards a civil war and opposing camps struggled for

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[53] It is a methodology foregrounded in her "historical" work, Sultanes oubliées also: "je crois que même les plus grands parmi les détectives m'auraient tout simplement conseillé d'aller dans une bibliothèque. Et, croyez-le ou pas, je n'ai pas eu à chercher beaucoup. Comme dans un conte de fées, du bruissement soyeux des pages ocres des vieux livres, sultanes, malikates et khatuns émergèrent peu à peu. Une à une, elles traversaient les salles muettes des bibliothèques [. . .]." (10).

the right of succession. Mernissi credits the astonishingly rapid rise of false Hadiths[54] to this political instability for those either in, or seeking, power quickly understood the need for and the obvious advantage of being able to turn to a Hadith which would confirm the "correctness" of their actions and the appropriateness of their rule. Bukhari, who carried out the first comprehensive compilation of Hadiths completed in approximately 870 (that is, 240 years after Muhammad's death) accumulated over 600,000 Hadiths. After having examined these various Hadiths according to the established procedures of verification he concluded, however, that only 7,275 were authentic (60); in other words, there already existed 592,725 false Hadiths! Mernissi is forced to conclude that "Comme tout pouvoir, dès le VII^{e} siècle déjà, ne se justifiait que par le religieux, les enjeux politiques et les intérêts économiques ont poussé à la fabrication de faux Hadiths" (16).

Even more radical is her statement that "Non seulement le texte sacré a toujours été manipulé, mais sa manipulation est une caractéristique structurelle de la pratique du pouvoir dans les sociétés musulmanes" (16). In the intertwining of political power and religious and juridical interpretations, Mernissi finds the sources of suppression

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[54] "Le faux Hadith est un témoinage alléguant que le Prophète aurait dit ceci ou fait cela, ce qui permet, du coup, de légitimer tel fait ou telle attitude" (Le harem politique 17).

of the rationalist tradition in Islam which she relates to the disregard for human rights. In La peur-modernité: conflit islam-démocratie Mernissi insists that the defenders of a rationalist philosophy within Islam "ont vu assez tôt le jour en Islam et ont continué parallèlement tout au long de son histoire" (47).

The Mu'tazila,[55] as these early Islamic rationalists were called, "furent des philosophes, des mathématiciens, des astronomes, mais aussi des sufis qui recherchaient dans les textes religieux tout ce qui pouvait étayer l'idée d'un individu pensant et responsable" (La peur-modernité 49). A classic example of such a mystical thinker is al-Hallaj who insisted that "chacun reflète la beauté divine et est donc nécessairement souverain" (30). Such teachings obviously undermined the authority of both imam and Caliph who would not be able to claim greater proximity to divine truth. The Mu'tazila's brief period of influence, during which their intellectual outlook played a part in the fall of the Umayyad empire and the rise of the Abbasids around 750, quickly dissolved, however, for the Abbasids, in turn, came to insist upon absolute rule. Seeking to undermine the Mu'tazila's influence the Abbasid rulers determined that

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[55] "The name of a religious movement founded at Basra in the first half of the 8th century [. . .] subsequently becoming one of the most important theological schools of Islam. The origins of this term - which has the sense of 'those who seperate themselves, who stand aside' - remains enigmatic" (Gimaret 783).

"l'ouverture sur la raison et l'opinion personnelle, et le culte de l'initiative privée" were foreign, and therefore condemned, to be replaced with ta'a (obedience) which banned reflection (53). The fruit of that tradition can be heard today in the fundamentalist's insistence that "toute revendication d'un rapport rationnel et critique au dirigeant est décriée comme un rejet de l'Islam et une absence de respect envers ses principes et ses idéaux" (53). This opposition towards all that is "foreign" is the object of inquiry in La peur-modernité and Mernissi comes to the startling conclusion that

> L'Orient éprouve une immense terreur, non parce que l'Occident est différent, mais parce qu'il reflète et exhibe le cœur même de cette partie de lui-même qu'il essaie de se cacher et d'enfouir: la responsabilité individuelle.
>
> La démocratie, c'est-à-dire l'insistance sur la souveraineté de l'individu face à l'arbitraire du chef, n'est pas aussi neuve que le crient nos imams. Elle est surtout refoulée. La démocratie, dans ce sens là, n'est étrangère à l'Orient musulman, elle est sa blessure gangrenée qu'il traîne depuis des siècles. (24-25)

It becomes clear in this passage that what is at stake is not "simply" political structures, social control and individual rights, but more profoundly the question of individual identity. The underlying question is, in fact:

who is to control the construction of individual identity in Muslim societies – the clergy, the state, or the individual? What is fascinating in Mernissi's work is the way in which she perceives the construction of that identity as textual, or necessarily based on the same textual evidence used by traditionalists. But she insists on maintaining a tension between two competing forces in the history of Islam. In La peur-modernité she writes:

> Deux voies étaient ouvertes devant les musulmans, celle de la fronde [. . .] et la voie du 'aql, la glorification de la raison, qui débuta avec les Mu'tazila [. . . qui] dressèrent l'individu pensant comme barrage contre l'arbitraire.
>
> [. . .] L'essence de notre modernité est que seule la voie violente et frondeuse est revendiquée de nos jours par ceux qui vocifèrent leur désir de nous diriger. La tradition rationaliste ne fait apparemment pas partie de leur héritage musulman. D'où la nécessité de l'esquisser. (46)

What we observe in this passage is that Mernissi's methodology is remarkably similar to the fundamentalist's: where the fundamentalist turns towards one tradition, she calls upon another. As Al-Azmeh has argued, this logic of claim to authenticity leads inevitably to a search for a lost essence:

> this entire ideological trope [of authenticity] can be described as one of ontological irredentism, it being the attempt to retrieve an essence that the vicissitudes of time and the designs of enemies, rather than a change of any intrinsic nature, had caused to atrophy. The counterpart of this was that the degraded conditions of today are mere corruptions of the original cultural essence, the retrieval of which is only possible by a return to the pristine beginnings which reside in the early days of Islam, the teachings of the book of God, the Koran, and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. (Al-Azmeh 42)

The paradox at the heart of Mernissi's endeavour is that while she seeks affirmation of Muslim female identity within the sacred texts, she also insists on the right of the Muslim individual to construct and negotiate that identity. In other words, she wants to carve out a space in which the divinely-decreed identity is also socially, historically and individually constructed. Such a constructed identity is far more literally textual than Khatibi's rather more "mystical" and metaphysical reflections in which identity is constantly adrift within language, as we shall see in the next chapter. This is not to say that the nature of Mernissi's individual identity is

not subject, ultimately, to similar linguistic complexities, for interpretation is frequently a linguistic matter.

A nice example of such linguistic complexity appears in Le harem politique. In the debate of the true meaning of the Qur'anic verse – "Give not unto the foolish [safih] (what is in) your (keeping of their) wealth, which Allah hath given you to maintain" (Sura 4, verse 5) – the ninth century Islamic scholar Tabari sought to resolve the question linguistically. Under dispute was the interpretation of the word safih, the foolish, for there were those who, so as to exclude them from the laws of inheritance, insisted that the term incorporated women and children. Rather than address the issue directly, Tabari argued that "Safih n'exclut que ceux qui ont atteint la maturité dans le sens de discernement, et par contre, ajoute-t-il, exclure les femmes de l'héritage c'est introduire une spécification par sexe qui n'existe pas dans le texte qoranique" (162). Mernissi adds that "Selon [Tabari], si Allah voulait dire que les femmes étaient insensées, il aurait pu utiliser le pluriel qu'il fallait" (162). Mernissi is incensed that "Jamais, à aucun moment, Tabari ne se place sur le terrain des principes" (161), but she herself must admit that it is up to her as a believer to determine "la meilleure façon pour nous de comprendre le mot Safih" (160). Furthermore, she recognizes that "À force de vouloir juguler leur subjectivité, les Fuqahas [religious scholars] furent réduits à accumuler les cas et les opinions

diverses les concernant. Puisqu'on donne à chacun le droit d'avoir son opinion, on aura une littérature de juxtapositions d'opinions" (162).

But of course, such has not been the case historically, and in Mernissi's re-reading of Islamic history[56] it is the Caliphs who betrayed Muhammad's message of sexual equality. In Sultanes oubliées: Femmes chefs d'état en Islam Mernissi writes that "Le hijab du khalife peut être considéré comme un événement clef qui précipita le khalifat dans le despotisme, car il constitue une rupture avec la tradition prophétique de la khotba [sermon] du vendredi exécutée par le souverain en personne" (131). And, in a strategy typical of her work, Mernissi investigates the question of women's access to the mosque for "Rien n'exprime davantage la trahison du Prophète en la matière [de 'l'Islam en tant que pratique politique [qui] s'engagea dès l'année 41, avec la prise du pouvoir de Mu'awiya qui va fonder la première dynastie musulmane, dans la voie despotique'] que l'attitude envers l'accès des femmes aux mosquées" (132). Mernissi finds in a text[57] written two hundred years after Muhammad's death the famous Hadith: "N'interdisez pas les masjids [mosques] d'Allah aux femmes d'Allah" (132). Three hundred

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[56] "[. . .] car notre libération passe par une relecture du passé et une réappropriation de tout ce qui a structuré notre civilisation" (La peur-modernité 210).

[57] The Kitab al-jum'a [Book of Friday], by Iman Bukhari.

years after that, however, we find the following question being asked by a leading theologian, which, Mernissi argues, constitutes "une trahison des textes anciens": "'Est-ce qu'il est permis aux femmes d'aller au masjid?'" (134). Mernissi summarizes this betrayal:

> On est bien loin de la mosquée du Prophète, ouverte à tous, qui recevait ceux qui étaient concernés par l'Islam, femmes comprises. Déjà fragmentée par le hijab politique qui cache le khalife et l'éloigne de ses fidèles, la mosquée assistera à une autre trahison de l'idéal communautaire de Mohammed: les femmes seront déclarées étrangères au lieu du culte. La femme qui a eu le privilège d'accèder à la mosquée en tant çahabiya, disciple du Prophète, va redevenir très rapidement l'être polluant et maléfique qu'elle était dans la Jahaliya, l'époque préislamique. On va faire renaître de ses cendres une misogynie qui plonge ses racines dans les peurs archaïques du féminin et ignore les tentatives du Prophète de les conjurer en insistant sur la nécessité pour le Musulman de tout partager avec sa femme. (Sultanes oubliées 136)

Clearly the purport of Mernissi's representation of Islamic history is to establish a golden era in early Islam whose betrayal Mernissi sees as the root cause of the

increasing absence of democratic political structures in Islam. Underlying this logic is Mernissi's conviction that Islam is not inherently grounded in inequality and gender segregation. This peculiar combination of politically strategic nostalgia and indomitable belief that change is possible in her country comes through clearly in this dream-like passage in Sultanes oubliées which is imbued with a profound sense of sadness and loss:

> On aurait pu imaginer la transformation du masjid, de la mosquée, en assemblée populaire avec l'expansion de la Umma et l'accroissement du nombre des musulmans. On aurait pu assister ainsi à la naissance, au sein de l'Islam, de la création d'une pratique démocratique basée sur une mosquée de quartier-assemblée locale, puisque la mosquée se trouve partout où il y a une communauté de musulmans et un chef pour la diriger. Le Prophète avait laissé tout en place pour qu'on s'avance dans cette direction. On aurait créé le Parlement au lieu d'en discuter comme si c'était une importation de l'Occident satanique. On aurait donné au monde, bien avant les autres nations, cet idéal qui animait le Prophète et toute sa stratégie: un groupe dirigé par un chef hakam, un arbitre, le titre qu'il aimait le plus et dont il était le plus fier. Mais les choses prirent une tournure différente [. . .]. (132)

That fateful turn led to a separation which reproduces "society's hierarchy and power allocation in the Muslim order" (Beyond the Veil 138). That is, "the spatial division according to sex reflects the division between those who hold authority and those who do not [. . . and] this division is based on the physical separation of the umma (the public sphere) from the domestic universe" (138).

The problem runs deeper still for Mernissi; not only is there a sharp contrast between the public and private spheres, but the institutions of polygamy and repudiation have been erected to "discourage, and even prohibit, communication between the sexes" (139). The irony, of course, is that these mechanisms merely serve to "fuel the conflicts" they are "supposed to avoid between men and women," and "intensif[y] what [they are] supposed to eliminate: the sexualization of human relations" (140). As a consequence, Mernissi argues, "the heterosexual relationship [has become] the locus of change and conflict" for with increased desegregation and contact between men and women in contemporary Moroccan society, there emerges "what the Muslim order condemns as a deadly enemy of civilization: love between men and women" (107). This love and communication is perceived as a threat by an order founded by a God who is "jealous of anything that might interfere with the believer's devotion to him" (115).

Mernissi describes very movingly in the final passages of Dreams of Trespass, the lengths to which the traditional

order went to ensure that no such communication could ever really develop, and no such "interference" take place. She details the events that led to her (male) cousin's eviction from the women's hamman at an early age when he is accused of having "a man's stare": "He might be four," one of the women says, "but I am telling you, he looked at my breast just like my husband does" (240). Until then, Samir and Fatima had always gone to the hamman together with her mother, and Mernissi recounts the sense of sadness she felt at the separation. She shares her sadness with Mina, a member of her grandfather's harem, who explains that "Childhood is when the difference does not matter. From now on," she tells her, "you won't be able to escape it. You'll be ruled by the difference (242)." Saddened and disturbed by this news the young Mernissi presses on:

> "But why?" I asked her, "and why can't we escape the rule of the difference? Why can't men and women keep on playing together even when they are older? Why the separation?" Mina replied not by answering my questions but by saying that both men and women live miserable lives because of the separation. Separation creates an enormous gap in understanding. "Men do not understand women," she said, "and women do not understand men, and it all starts when little girls are separated from little boys in the hammam. Then a cosmic frontier splits the planet in two halves. The frontier indicates

> the line of power because wherever there is a frontier, there are two kinds of creatures walking on Allah's earth, the powerful on one side, and the powerless on the other."
>
> I asked Mina how would I know on which side I stood. Her answer was quick, short, and very clear: "If you can't get out, you are on the powerless side." (240-242)

In the scene with which I began this chapter, the spatial separation between inside and outside can still be observed. But in this contemporary example, we see that the attempt to contain and control female identity has produced obvious paradoxes that threaten the very boundaries Mernissi describes and whose establishment she traces to the political struggles ensuing the death of the Prophet. Mernissi's primary focus on the history of Islam and her desire to find a golden age of gender relations has forestalled the possibility of engaging with the new paradoxes of contemporary Morocco. That is not to say, however, that she has not turned to more recent chapters of Moroccan history. As we have seen, she has drawn on interviews with women, and in Dreams of Trespass she writes about her own upbringing. Although her memoirs present us with a more descriptive project, we shall see that in a curious way they replicate some of the same intellectual paradoxes as her analytical work.

In Dreams of Trespass Mernissi recounts the stories of those women from her childhood world who did not "get out;" in so doing, Mernissi's writing becomes a means of giving these women a voice. In the introduction to Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes, a collection of interviews with Moroccan women, most of whom are illiterate, Mernissi comments that what separates her from the women she interviews is an accident of history. As she seems to imply, she writes on their behalf as if to correct that historical injustice:

> Je ne pouvais pas objectiver la femme illettrée parce que j'avais avec elle une relation affective très particulière: je m'identifais à elle. Je suis née en 1940 et très peu de femmes marocaines de cette génération ont eu accès à l'écriture, encore moins à l'éducation supérieure. J'ai donc le sens très fort d'avoir échappé à l'analphabétisme par un miracle qui frise l'absurdité. Pour moi, essayer de faire s'exprimer la femme illettrée, c'est donner la parole à ce moi-même qui aurait pu être voué au silence ancestral. Mon rapport à l'écriture, à son utilisation est très conditionné par ce fait. (Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes 31)

Mernissi's desire not to objectify these women stems from a certain sense of guilt about the work – she "got out" when others did not – and a feeling of nostalgia for the

relationships between women she remembers from her childhood. The representation and recovery of some of these relationships form the core of Dreams of Trespass. In this autobiographical fiction Mernissi presents us with a rich and plural world of Moroccan women whose identities are formed through complex relationships with other women.

Central to her valorization of women's lives in the harem, as in her discussion of women's rights in early Islam, is the establishment of individual identity. Mernissi makes an important distinction between individuality and individualism: individuality is the expression of a fully articulated, discrete subjectivity which must be allowed to flourish; individualism is the "souveraineté de l'individu" (La peur-modernité 140), arrogance run rampant, "le règne débridé du hawa, le désir et l'égoïsme individuels" (120). For Mernissi, individuality and responsibility are inseparable: "C'est à l'individu, en l'absence du clergé," she writes, "de garder le sens de la mesure et de ne jamais perdre de vue l'intérêt de la communauté" (121). Indeed, Mernissi identifies this relationship between the individual and the community as one of the most crucial issues the Muslim world must face if it is to move forward in a "modern" world: "Là est le lieu de toute la réflexion et du débat planétaire que les musulmans sont appelés à entreprendre, celui du rapport entre le bien et la réflexion individuelle, le problème de l'intérêt public et de l'épanouissement individuel" (129). For

Mernissi, however, the problem does not lie within Islam - as Ben Jelloun's novels would seem to argue; on the contrary, "c'est là le génie de l'Islam, il ne s'agit pas d'exclure, d'éradiquer le désir, il faut le gérer de façon à ce qu'il ne dépasse pas les hudud, les limites sacrées. L'Islam ne rejette rien," she concludes, "il gère" (121).

This delicate balance between individual identity and the community is wonderfully illustrated throughout Dreams of Trespass. Observing Mina, a former slave kidnapped from her native Sudan as a young girl, dancing to the entrancing music of the Gnawa musicians, a young Fatima notices how she "reacted to the softest of the rhythms, and even then, she danced off of the beat, as if the music she was dancing to was coming from the inside" (162):

> I admired her for that and for a reason I still do not understand. [. . .] maybe it was because Mina managed to combine two seemingly contradictory roles – to dance with a group, but also to keep her own offbeat rhythm. I wanted to dance like her, with the community, but also to my own secret music, springing from a mysterious source deep within, and stronger than the drums. (162)

For such a relationship between the individual and the community to function it must involve a dialogue in which the rhythms of the individual are heard by the rhythms of the community which in turn are heeded by the individual.

Mernissi's conception of subjectivity is deeply rooted in her Islamic interpretation of the world. In particular, I am thinking of Islam's extensive exegetical tradition, presented in fine detail in Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition by Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi. In their introduction to the chapter "Qur'anic Dialogics" they write that

> three sorts of dialogue are central to the reading of the Qur'an: dialogue in the colloquial sense of oral communication between two face-to-face persons; dia-logue in the Greek etymological sense of cross-play between arguments; and dialogue in the sense of juxtaposition of points of view in a political struggle for hegemonic control of interpretation of how the world should be seen [. . .]. (97)

It is from this tradition that Mernissi draws her understanding of human relations, exemplified in Dreams of Trespass where all three forms of dialogue can be found.

There is, of course, a great deal of oral communication amongst all of the women and children in the harem,[58] from the many questions Fatima poses her Grandmother Yasmina

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[58] Mernissi defines the "domestic" harem as an "extended family [. . .] with no slaves and no eunuchs [in contrast with imperial harems], and often with monogamous couples, but who carried on the tradition of women's seclusion" (Dreams of Trespass 34 fn.3).

regarding such matters as the nature of harems and freedom, and Mina about difference and maturity, to the tales of Scheherazade her mother tells her and the many explanations she must provide along the way, to the conversations she has with, and the counsel she receives from, her Aunt Habiba.

A fine example of the "cross-play between arguments" is the manner in which Fatima and her cousins Samir and Malika attempt to understand what a harem is:

> Then Malika asked a question, a rather simple question: "Is a harem a house in which a man lives with many wives?" Each one of us came up with a different answer. Malika said the answer was yes, since that was the case with her own family. [. . .] Samir said the answer was no, because you could have a harem without co-wives, like that of his father, Uncle 'Ali, or my father.
>
> My answer to Malika's question was more complicated. I said that it depended. If I thought about Grandmother Yasmina, the answer was yes. If I thought about Mother, the answer was no. [. . .] Finally, Samir and Malika decided that they had started with too complicated a question. We had to go back to the beginning, and ask the silliest question of all, "Do all married men have harems?" From there, we could work our way up. (150)

Finally, a dispute between Grandmother Yasmina and her co-wife Lalla Thor (who was Grandfather Tazi's first wife) provides a delightful example of "dialogue in the sense of juxtaposition of points of view in a political struggle":

> One of the constant preoccupations of the co-wives was how to make housework more entertaining, and one day Mabrouka, who loved swimming, suggested that they try washing the dishes in the river. Lalla Thor was scandalized, and said that the idea was totally against Muslim civilization. "These peasant women are going to destroy the reputation of this house," she fumed, "just as the venerable historian Ibn Khaldun predicted six hundred years ago in his Muqaddimah, when he said that Islam was essentially a city culture and peasants were its threat." [. . .] Lalla Thor took the matter to Grandfather [who] summoned Mabrouka and Yasmina to him. He asked them to explain their project. They did so, and then argued that although they were indeed both illiterate peasants, they were not dumb, and simply could not take Ibn Khaldun's words as sacred. After all, they said, he was just a historian. They would gladly renounce their proposed project, if Lalla Thor could produce a fatwa (decree) from the Qaraouiyine Mosque religious authorities banning women from washing dishes in rivers, but until that time,

> they would do as they pleased. After all, a river was Allah's creation, a manifestation of his power, and if, in any case, swimming were a sin, they would pay for it once in front of him, on Judgement Day. Grandfather, impressed by their logic, adjourned the meeting by saying that he was glad that responsibility was an individual matter in Islam. (68-69)

I have quoted at some length here because I want to demonstrate the manner in which the various levels of exchange functioned amongst these women, and secondly, to convey a sense at least of the women and their lives: to illustrate that they are far from grey, drab, vacuous victims, as we find in Ben Jelloun's work or in the Western media. The complexity and diversity of the women's lives and responses to their situation troubles the stereotypes of oppressed female existence and in fact gives voice to multiple energies bursting forth from the text: the storytelling, the singing, the dancing, the performing, the sewing, the gardening, the eating, the smoking, and the caring.

I have already commented upon Mina's participation in the "ambiguous hadra, or possession dances" (159), but there are several additional elements about it worth noting. Mina explains that for the rich the hadra were more of a form of entertainment, whereas for Mina it was "a rare opportunity to get away, to exist in a different way, to travel" (159).

The presence of these wealthy women and their generosity (they would always arrive bearing expensive gifts for the exorcist) "were appreciated," however, "by all as an expression of women's solidarity" (159). Furthermore, as the nationalists were against these possession dances, considering them un-Islamic, and as Fatima's father and Uncle, under whose care Mina was, were nationalists, she, like the wealthy women of high-ranking families, had to attend them secretly. Nevertheless, "all the women and the children knew about it anyway, and practically all of [them] had accompanied" Mina at one time or another (160). "Beyond friendship," Mernissi explains, "we all were irresistibly drawn to the evidently subversive possession ceremony, during which women would dance away with their eyes closed and their long hair floating from left to right, as if all modesty and bodily restraints had been abandoned" (160).[59] In addition to these yearly hadras there was also the singing and dancing to Radio Cairo that took place within the confines of the harem:

> Sometimes, in the late afternoons, as soon as the men left the house, the women would jump to the

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[59] Winifred Woodhull discusses Mernissi's observation elsewhere ("Women, Saints and Sanctuaries," in Women and National Development) "that in Morocco visits to shrines constitute a 'power operation' in which women elude the medical, legal, and religious experts who disqualify them as agents capable of defining and proposing solutions to their problems" (Woodhull 55).

> radio, unlock it with their illegal key, and start a frantic search for music and love songs [. . .].
>
> [. . .] when [Cousin] Chama's magic fingers [on the radio dial] captured the ravishing voice of Princess Asmahan of Lebanon, whispering on the air waves, "Ahwa! Ana, ana, ana, ahwa!" (I am in love! I, I, I am in love!). Then, the women were in ecstasy. They would toss their slippers away and dance barefooted in procession around the fountain, with one hand holding up their caftans, and the other hugging an imaginary male partner. (103, 104)

Whilst both forms of dancing are obviously expressions of repressed sexuality at one level, they fall outside of the male domains. The dancing is a manifestation of desire that recalls Deleuze and Guattari's description of "lines of escape" which do not necessarily destabilize a system of power or oppression but allow forms of agency within that system: "Le problème: pas du tout être libre, mais trouver une issue, ou bien une entrée, ou bien un côté, un couloir, une adjacence, etc." (Deleuze 15). Singing with and dancing to Princess Asmahan transported these women not just anywhere, but to a longing shared by women wherever she was heard. In fact, Princess Asmahan became a source of inspiration to the women in the harem, and her life was repeatedly dramatized by Chama, Fatima's cousin. This re-enactment, another "line of escape," was also an act that

contrived to achieve the delicate balance between individual expression and communal needs, for if a woman was not a member of the supporting cast then she was a member of the very necessary, and often very vocal audience: "'You have to have someone sitting there to see the play!'" Chama would insist, "'You can't have a theater without an audience!'" (Dreams of Trespass 125). Like the radio-dances, the performances were also celebrations of a much broader community of women for, in addition to the regular re-enactments of the life of Princess Asmahan, the "troupe" performed Scheherazade's tale of Princess Budur, the lives of Egyptian and Lebanese feminists such as Aisha Taymour (1840-1906), Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914) and Huda Sha'raoui (1879-1947),[60] and religious figures Khadija and Aisha, two of the Prophet Muhammad's wives.

Another form of expression which brought together individual and communal desire was storytelling. In the harem in Fez the storyteller was Aunt Habiba, who found herself in the harem because she had been divorced by her husband: "Her husband had kept everything from their marriage," Mernissi is told, "with the idea that should he ever lift his finger and ask her to come home again, she would bow her head and come rushing back" (17); but she

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[60] Writings by all three women can be found in Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke's anthology Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing.

never did. "'He [could] never take the most important things away from me,'" Aunt Habiba explained, "'my laughter and all the wonderful stories I can tell when the audience is worth it'" (17). In the harem on the farm (Grandmother Yasmina's home) the official storyteller was Yaya, "the foreign black co-wife" from Sudan. Because of her fragility, the co-wives proposed an arrangement wherein they took care of her share of the housework in exchange for a weekly story. "During storytelling night, all the co-wives would gather in Yaya's room, and tea trays would be brought in, while she talked about her wonderful homeland. After a few years," Mernissi continues, "the co-wives knew the details of her life so well that they could fill in for her when she hesitated or started doubting the faithfulness of her memory" (55).

Storytelling, singing and dancing were also means of welcoming other women into the harem community. We find such an example in the story of the arrival of Tamou, one of Mernissi's grandfather's wives. Initially she appeared alone, on horseback, asking for supplies to take back to her people who were fighting Spanish and French forces in the Riffian mountains. When she returned a few days later, however, it was with her slain father, husband and two children. It took Tamou months to recover, screaming regularly in her sleep and never uttering a word. "Then one morning, Tamou was seen caressing a cat and putting a flower in her hair, and that night Yasmina organized a party for

her. The co-wives gathered together in her pavilion and sang so she would feel that she belonged" (52).

This is not to suggest that life in the harem appealed to all of the women living in it. The feelings ranged from Grandmother Yasmina's declaration that "strangely enough, we co-wives feel closer to one another than ever [. . .]. We feel like sisters; our real family is the one that we have woven around your Grandfather" (136), to Fatima's mother's distaste for harem life. The women were vocally, and often bitterly, divided on the merits of harem existence. Those in the pro-harem camp argued that if "women were not separated from men society would ground to a halt and work would not get done" (40). To this Fatima's mother countered that the "French do not imprison their wives behind walls [. . .] and everyone has fun, and still the work gets done. In fact," she continued, "so much work gets done that they can afford to equip strong armies and come here to shoot us" (42). Despite her mother's frustrations and despite the barriers these women faced, Mernissi maintains that they were never reduced to mere victims such as those depicted in Ben Jelloun's novels: Zahra, who is forced to be Muhammed Ahmed, the mother who passively serves her husband, and the featureless sisters who brutalize their sibling.[61] Mernissi

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[61] Indeed, it is curious that it would seem to be the male writers who, caught up in the enthusiasms of their critiques of patriarchal Islam, deny women subjectivity. Consider, for example, a passage from

describes a balance between power and resistance in harem life which preserved female agency. Although there is no doubt that such possibilities of individual expression did exist in women's lives, there is a curious tension between these representations and Mernissi's insistence elsewhere that women can have no voice or agency without democratic structures similar to those in the West.

It would seem that Dreams of Trespass is steeped in the same recuperative project we have already examined in Le harem politque where she seeks to "recapture some of the wonderful and beautiful moments in the first Muslim city in the world, Medina of the year 622,[62] [when the Prophet] spoke of matters dangerous to the establishment, of human dignity and equal rights" (The Veil and the Male Elite viii). Likewise, Dreams of Trespass "recaptures some of the

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Driss Chraïbi's first novel, Le passé simple, a passage remarkably similar to ones found in Ben Jelloun's novels: "Elle [the protagonist's mother] souscrivait à toutes les catastrophes éventuelles. Qu'était-elle, sinon une femme dont le Seigneur pouvait cadenasser les cuisses et sur laquelle il avait droit de vie et de mort? Elle avait toujours habité des maisons à portes barricadées et fenêtres grillagées. Des terrasses, il n'y avait que le ciel à voir - et les minarets, symboles. Une parmi les créatures de Dieu que le Coran a parquées: 'Baisez-les et les rebaisez; par le vagin, c'est plus utile; ensuite, ignorez-les jusqu'à la jouissance prochaine.' Oui, ma mère était ainsi, faible, soumise, passive" (43-44).

[62] The year of the hejira.

wonderful and beautiful moments" of her personal past, and in so doing brings to life an impressive collection of women. And yet, as vibrant as these women are, they remain as frozen in the past as the "forgotten queens" Mernissi unearths from Islam's ancient past in Sultanes oubliées.

The way in which Mernissi both wants to recover moments of emancipatory potential and articulate a different construction of female identity replicates the paradoxes that have plagued many Third World projects of liberation, be they nationalist or feminist. In Colonial Fantasies Meyda Yeğenoğlu, paraphrasing Partha Chatterjee, pinpoints these contradictions:

> one of the characteristic features of [Third World] nationalism is a basic split that divides it: while it aspires to become modern and achieve the "valued" qualities of Enlightment, at the same time it asserts its autonomous identity by claiming an authentic, pure, and uncontaminated origin. It therefore simultaneously accepts and refutes the epistemic and moral dominance of the West. (Yeğenoğlu 123)

Hence the schizophrenic nature of Mernissi's work which orbits like a planet around a binary star system, endlessly going round and round unable to break free. The binary stars in question are in evidence in her first work, Beyond the Veil which as we have seen is divided into two distinct segments: the first archival section examines the nature of

the "traditional Muslim view of women;" the second juxtaposes this with contemporary Moroccan reality as gleaned from interviews and letters. The very distinctness and separateness of the sections reflects the split in her corpus, for, although the interviews clearly reveal the unhappiness many women feel about their condition, be it economic or amorous, and, although Mernissi is able to illustrate the yawning gap that exists between an ancient ideal and a contemporary reality, her work fails to establish a bridge between the two. What do her excavations achieve? How can the awareness of the past which these archival challenges bring be made to change the present?

Furthermore, even her homage to the vitality of the women of her childhood harem cannot free itself of the binary she has established between illiteracy and literacy, in which illiteracy is equated with voicelessness and powerlessness, and literacy with having a voice and freedom. That binary is evident in the passage quoted earlier from Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes when she writes that for her, "essayer de faire s'exprimer la femme illettrée, c'est donner la parole à ce moi-même qui aurait pu être voué au silence ancestral." And yet her own observations of the women of the harem belie that silence. Consider, for example, the exchange that took place over the washing of the dishes in the river. Mabrouka and Yasmina explain that "although they were indeed both illiterate peasants, they

were not dumb" and proceeded to win the day articulately voicing their case.

These women can be considered to have been silent only if a "voice" is understood as (a) the capacity to read and write, and/or (b) as contingent on the full and equal presence of women in the professional and political fields. Obviously, this is not to say that illiteracy is not debilatating, nor that it is not a problem in need of official redress in Morocco. Equally valid and necessary is Mernissi's passionate fight for equal access to all aspects of public life. But Mernissi is caught in a binary vision that prevents her from transposing her memories of the various ways in which women lived in and reacted to harem life onto the variegated ways women around her in modern Rabat (for example) find spaces outside of the dominant male discourse whilst simultaneously refusing to remain on the "inside."

As in the scene of transformation I observed on February 3, 1997 in Morocco, there are indeed numerous instances of blurring of boundaries in women's lives which could provide Mernissi with manifestations of new and different challenges posed to a seemingly rigid and inflexible gender codification. Her own passage from harem life to a university setting could have provided an interesting example of unexpected ruptures from within. In other words, a return to and critical examination of the very spatial metaphor on which she founds her analyses could

reveal possible sites of resistance. Is it possible, for instance, to impose the simple binarism of inside and outside on the contemporary scene in Morocco? I would like to turn to another event I witnessed while I was living in Morocco to shed some light on the ways in which both the spaces marked as inside and outside are undergoing re-interpretation. The point is not whether these revisions are leading to new forms of emancipation, but rather how one might engage with these changes.

In January 1997 my wife and I were invited to an eleven year-old girl's birthday party, by her sister Naima whom we had befriended. She worked as a dental assistant across the street from our apartment.

The family was very much a microcosm reflecting many of the radical social changes taking place in Morocco at that moment. We faced a shift within one generation from a self-effacing mother who was not educated, was married at fifteen and had seven children, to six daughters, all of whom were educated, none of whom were married, who dressed in a "westernized" manner, went out to cafés and night-clubs, and talked to boys. The unmarried status of the daughters reflected both their desire to not marry young and have a career, as well as the disturbingly high rate of unemployment amongst Morocco's youth that prevented many from getting married.

The family was Berber and of rural origin. Naima's mother, Fatima, was the eldest in her family and her mother

had decided to keep her at home so that she could help with the household chores. Fatima's two sisters, Malika and Aicha, however, went to school. The contrast between the sisters was striking. Fatima was dressed traditionally and wore a head scarf; she had always stayed at home, married at fifteen and had seven children. Meanwhile, Malika had become a doctor, got married in her early thirties and had two children. She was dressed à la mode française. Aicha had an administrative job, was twice divorced and had no children; she was wearing a stylish djellaba, make-up, earrings, her hair was uncovered, and she was very outgoing, in sharp contrast to the reserved and withdrawn manner of Naima's mother.

The issue of education was not a simple one for the family was not especially well off: that all the children had been educated was already quite remarkable for the cost of school supplies often prohibits parents from sending all of their children to school. This does not mean, as one might at first assume, that boys are sent to school and the girls are kept at home. On the contrary, the boys are often made to help with the father's work or find a job at which they can learn a trade. But matters were more difficult in Naima's family with regard to post-secondary school. On occasion Naima had expressed a certain amount of bitterness about the fact that she was not able to pursue the post-secondary studies she would have liked. Instead she had to enter a trade program that could place her more certainly in

the work force. Indeed, she contributed significantly to the family income. It was she, for example, who had paid for the couches, cushions and coverings in the living room. Her father was a retired army officer with a very small pension. Hajiba, one of her sisters, was enrolled at a computer college but was not allowed to re-enter the program until she was able to pay fees owing from the previous term, which Naima would have to pay.

Matters were very different for Aunt Malika's children. Like many professional families, the aunt had placed her children in a "mission française." This is done for a number of reasons. For one, the acquisition of a second language – be it French, Spanish, German or, increasingly, English – is seen as indispensable to one's future success. For another, an education at the "mission" provides much easier access to French post-secondary institutions. For a third, Morocco's education system is seen by the elite as inferior.

At one point in the evening we went on a errand to a local shop with Naima, and on the way we encountered Amina, a younger sister (aged twenty-five) who was sitting in a car with a young man. They got out and, after the usual greetings, Amina introduced him as "mon ami;" not grasping the significance of this introduction we simply nodded and went on our way. It was only later that we realized what "ami" <u>really</u> meant. They had been seeing each other for three years, but he could not yet be invited into the house.

They were sitting in the car, "waiting for the birthday cake to be ready," they said; Amina showed up with the cake three hours later. In today's Morocco there are few places for a young, unmarried, courting couple to go. Couples can be stopped at night and if no family link can be established between the two the police can make life quite unpleasant.

The party consisted of twenty females (women and girls) and one male (me); there were the six sisters, each of whom had invited a close friend, three or four close friends invited by the birthday girl, her two young cousins, and the two aunts. El-Hechmi, our young concierge, greatly regretted his decision not to come with us when I later told him how the women danced non-stop. They mostly danced to Berber music, but also some classical Arabic, and a dance mix of "C'est dur dur dur d'être bébé." Some of the sisters were much better dancers than others but this did not seem to matter. Those who danced well, Naima, for example, and Aunt Aicha, who provided lessons to the ten year olds, were very much appreciated for their talent but those who danced less well, less elegantly, more awkwardly (the sister in her late teens for example), or whose bodies didn't conform to any Vogue-like standards danced without embarrassment and each had their moment of being center stage.

Halima, seventeen or so, wore make-up and, like her sisters, was dressed in jeans. Her friend, however, was referred to as a "Muslim sister." Apparently she always wore a scarf fully covering her hair except at home and with

only family members present. From the neck down, however, she was wearing spiffy, yet discreet pants. She would never speak with men other than family members. Her social interactions, in other words, were to reflect a very pious manner. Naima explained that one chooses to be a "sister," "comme ça," that it can be a passing phase and that it can be a personal choice and not a function of family or social pressure. It is, in other words, often an individual choice, as it was for Halima's friend.[63] Naima said that at one point, around the age of seventeen, she seriously contemplated becoming a "sister" but in the end decided against it. She disapproved of such gender restrictions, and spoke very strongly against those who use Islam as a cover for political ambitions. It was fascinating to see Halima's friend sitting there in all her orthodoxy next to Halima in her jeans and make-up. At first I imagined her to be disapproving of the goings-on, the displays of shaking hips before her on the "dance floor" but realized that that

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[63] This question of individual choice is one of the fascinating aspects of "islamisme." At a conference in Salé in January 1997 Muhammad Tozy described an aspect of "islamisme" as the breakdown of traditional centers of Islamic authority. Whereas in the past fatwas were rare and decreed from above, for example, Tozy described the current situation in Algeria as one of a "complete deregulation" of fatwa issuance. Faith, and therefore, Qur'anic and shar'ia interpretation, in other words, becomes an entirely individual matter (Tozy, "L'expérience religieuse marocaine").

was an assumption I was bringing to the situation and that she was enjoying herself as much as everyone else.

This scene is reminiscent of some of Mernissi's descriptions in Dreams of Trespass, especially in the way in which it embraces a diversity of female embodiments. But there is a marked difference in that some of the women in the contemporary scene are already professionals and exist on the "outside." If access to education and professional life is not now universally denied Moroccan women, we would have to wonder how Mernissi's own binarism of the literate and illiterate might fit in dealing with gender inequalities that continue to haunt Moroccan social and cultural institutions. Dreams of a golden era are equally illusory in the face of complexities such as those I observed. That the answer does not lie in a return to a pure essence of Islamic ideal or a total embrace of Western ideas is evident in Mernissi's later writings, especially after the Gulf War.

There is a marked shift in these works whose tone betrays a loss of optimism and the belief in the possibility of Morocco and other Islamic countries gaining access to progress and modernity.

In the introduction to her revised edition of Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes which was reissued as Le monde n'est pas un harem: Paroles de femmes du Maroc, Mernissi despairs of the possibility of dialogue with the West and, by extension, the possibility of being placed among the voices of enlightenment and modernity:

> Apparemment ni ce livre [Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes] ni aucun autre n'a amélioré en quoi que ce soit le sort des femmes. La situation des femmes pauvres au Maroc n'a pas changé d'un iota depuis les années 70 où ces douze interviews furent réalisées. Sauf qu'il y a davantage de jeunes filles paysanes condamnées à l'analphabétisme (plus de 90% selon les dernières statistiques) que leurs parents placent comme bonnes, et beaucoup plus d'ouvrières du prolétariat urbain qui ne reçoivent pas le salaire minimum, et des millions de femmes qui travaillent chaque année plus nombreuses sans Sécurité sociale et sans aucune protection, divine ou profane. À quoi donc sert ce genre de livre si ce n'est à donner l'impression à l'auteur qu'il est important? Et me sentir importante est une droque vitale pour moi, car tout me prouve à chaque minute le contraire. (Le monde n'est pas un harem 7-8)

It is clear that the Gulf war imposed on Mernissi a radical re-examination of what it meant to be an intellectual, a feminist, a scholar devoted to adapting Moroccan and Islamic civilization to Western ideals of democracy and individual rights. In the wake of a war which co-opted and eradicated anti-imperialist voices, Mernissi finds her own emancipatory project subsumed to renewed assertions of power both from within and without. While she had believed to have been

struggling solely against the traditionalists and Islamist forces, she now faced a double dilemma of being marginalized by manifestations of other discourses of power:

> la règle numéro un pour une femme intellectuelle arabe est de ne pas se compliquer la vie plus qu'elle ne l'est. Laissez le rôle de policier aux patriarches, après tout c'est leur domaine. [. . .] La liberté, l'affirmation de soi consiste dans ce genre de situation à partir de l'unique valeur qui compte: soi-même. [. . .]
>
> L'interdit suprême c'est notre individualité, avec ses exigences de plaisirs et de bonheurs intrinsèquement égoïstes et en contradiction flagrante avec celles d'un groupe qui s'est constitué autour de notre dépouillement de toute décision, de toute initiative. Diriger sa vie pour se faire plaisir, lorsqu'on a la chance d'accéder à l'éducation et à un emploi salarié convenable, et investir ses énergies d'une façon capricieuse, selon le penchant du moment, le désir de l'heure, est, selon moi, la meilleure façon de ne pas se perdre, de ne pas perdre le fil des jours. (Le monde n'est pas un harem 11)

Although Mernissi's later writings reveal that she eventually moves away from the intense despair of this moment, her introduction to Le monde n'est pas un harem marks a turning point in her intellectual thought. She will

turn away from her examination of the Islámic past, and her direct and welcoming address to a Western audience she sought to engage in a dialogue. Her writing has since turned inwards, speaking more directly to her Moroccan compatriots.

The last gasp (or so it stands at the present moment) of her re-examination of Arabic and Islamic history is La peur-modernité: conflit Islam démocratie published in 1992. Although the work's methodology is the same as Beyond the Veil, Le harem politique and Sultanes oubliées, there is a distinct shift in its tone. It is an angry work, and Mernissi's anger is directed at both the West and her own Moroccan and Islamic community:

> La guerre du Golfe a pris fin. Les soldats impliqués dans le conflit ont regagné leurs casernes depuis longtemps. Mais pour beaucoup de gens, et j'en fais partie, cette guerre relève des phénomènes qui n'ont pas de fins, tels que les traumatismes, les blessures symboliques et les maladies congénitales inguérissables. (7)

So opens La peur-modernité – with the war and its wounds. The work is a response to that conflict and a challenge to those responsible, at both a macro level – decision-makers – and at a micro level – all of those who benefit from those decisions.

Mernissi makes abundantly clear that there is a very direct and clear connection between the Gulf War and the

fate of women in the Arab world: "Précaire est déjà une destinée de femme dans une société arabe vivant en paix. Vacillante est cette destinée de femme dans une société mise à feu et à sang par des forces étrangères" (9). The very real fear for women is that the male order, feeling threatened and humiliated from without – and clearly helpless in the face of the superior onslaught – will seek affirmation by controlling the perceived threat from within: women:

> Traditionnellement, les femmes sont désignées comme les victimes rituelles de rééquilibrage. Dès que la cité chavire dans le désordre, le khalife demande aux femmes de ne plus sortir. Serons-nous, femmes vivant dans les cités musulmanes, qui portons la frontière du désir tatouée sur nos corps, utilisées, pour la sécurité identitaire, dans les rituels à venir par tous ceux qui ont peur de poser le vrai problème, celui de l'individualisme et de la responsabilité sexuelle et politique? (18)

Interestingly Mernissi responds to this threat by embarking on an auto-critique, asking that the Islamic world engage with its own fears. She issues a call for self-examination; at the same time she continues to critique Western stereotypes of the Arab:

> l'Occident et ses caméras, pris dans un autre <u>hijab</u> et dans d'autres peurs, ne voient dans le

> monde arabe qu'une aube de fanatisme obscurantiste. J'étais parmi la foule que TV5, une chaîne européenne, a interviewée le 3 février [1990] à Rabat durant la marche de solidarité avec l'Irak. Le commentateur français l'a présentée comme une manifestation d'intégristes xénophobes où le drapeau français fut brulé. Il est vrai que le drapeau français fut brulé et que les intégristes ont défilé, mais à côté d'autres groupes, toutes les tendances de la gauche marocaine, et des milliers d'indépendants comme moi, venus de tous les horizons, des universitaires aux petits gens. (25-26)

This frustration with the representation of the Arab world by the West had never before been so explicitly stated in her work. In fact, in La peur-modernité, an absolute schism would appear to have opened between East and West:

> C'est cette ambiguïté des Européens envers la violence – et je parle ici en termes ethniques, car la guerre du Golfe a fait régresser les discours au niveau le plus archaïque: celui de deux tribus qui campent sur l'une et l'autre rive de la Méditerranée – qui a créé la confusion et la déroute dans les esprits. Jamais je n'ai senti mes collègues du Nord si figés dans leur européanité, et moi si figée dans mon arabité, chacun si archaïque dans son irréductible

> différence, que durant ma visite en Allemagne et en France lors de la guerre, afin de participer à des débats qui étaient supposés amorcer un dialogue, et qui n'établissaient que notre pitoyable impuissance à traverser la frontière. (13)

In an interview conducted in 1993 Mernissi comments that she had written La peur-modernité "pour les Occidentaux, parce que j'avais peur qu'ils oublient cette guerre qui pour nous a été une rupture [. . . et] je voulais surtout culpabiliser les Occidentaux" ("Fatima Mernissi par elle-même" 140). Mernissi's bitterness is in part rooted in her own investment in discourses of progress and modernity. Although she attempts to shift the ground of her analysis to self-critique, even this critique is imbued with the rhetoric of democracy and rights anchored in Western intellectual thought. Despite her intense anger and bitterness, Mernissi refuses to indulge in self-pity however; on the contrary, she perceives in the Gulf War an opportunity for the Arab World to examine itself. The challenges she issues to the West are in fact addressed to the betrayal of the very ideals she has adopted from post-Enlightenment thought.

It is this betrayal that leads to her critique of documents produced in the West about the Arab/Islamic world. In Êtes-vous vacciné contre le Harem? (although published in 1998 it was actually written in 1994-95) she discusses,

amongst others, the paintings of Ingrès, a seventeenth century text written by a German pastor in praise of polygamy, a collection of poems by Victor Hugo, the origins of the harem in ancient Greece and Rome and its nature in Ottoman Turkey. Through a scrutiny of these and other texts, Mernissi attempts to explore an aspect of Western male sexual desire as it found expression in representations of the harem, the eunuch, and the concubine.

The work's latent impetus is the Gulf War's dark cloud which continues to hover overhead. Mernissi writes that Êtes-vous vacciné contre le Harem? is not "une étude sur le Maroc," but is "une tentative de déterrer les attitudes archaïques chez nos voisins européens et d'en rire un peu, et, ce faisant, de nous regonfler en nous donnant confiance" (8).[64]

An example she provides of those "attitudes archaïques" is a postcard written by Matisse to Gertrude Stein in France during his stay in Tangier in 1912. The postcard depicted two Moroccan women doubled over by the weight of the sacks of coal on their backs, and on it he wrote "Pays où les féministes sont tout à fait inconnues malheureusement car les hommes abusent" (47). Mernissi has much to say about

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[64] And more specifically, Mernissi writes: "On a l'impression, qu'après le choc de la guerre du Golfe où notre vulnérabilité à tous, dirigeants et dirigés, fut insupportable, hommes et femmes ont unanimement changé de discours et d'attitude" (Êtes-vous vacciné contre le Harem? 29).

this comment and juxtaposes its feminist veneer with Matisse's painterly depictions of intensely sexualized and fantasized Oriental harems. But she is forced to recognize that his remark is all too regrettably contemporary in nature, a fact brought home to her by a telephone conversation she had with a French journalist:

> après la guerre du Golfe, j'ai été contactée par le magazine français Marie-Claire qui voulait m'interviewer sur le harem. Quand j'ai répondu que je préférais des questions sur mon livre La peur-modernité: Islam et démocratie inspiré par la guerre du Golfe et qui venait de sortir à Paris, la journaliste me répondit qu'on ne lui paierait le voyage au Maroc que si j'acceptais de parler du harem. Je lui expliquai que je donnerais volontiers des interviews sur le harem à la sortie de mon roman Rêves de femmes[65] qui aborde cette question, mais qu'après le traumatisme de la guerre je préférais parler de mon livre sur le Golfe: elle me confia que pour son chef "le harem était le seul angle intéressant pour parler de la femme musulmane." (49-50)

Frustrated by this realization Mernissi turns her back in some respects on Europe and the West, and looks to Morocco for solace and inspiration.

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[65] The French translation of Dreams of Trespass.

In Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut-Atlas she chronicles expressions of local democracies, a direction suggested in a passing remark made in La peur-modernité: "La mobilisation populaire s'est toujours faite et se fera toujours autour du concept qoranique de taghia [tyrant], tant que la démocratie en tant qu'éducation et participation quotidienne à la décision n'aura pas imprégné les lieuxs populaires de la culture de masse" (143, emphasis added). In Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut-Atlas, her most recent publication, Mernissi recounts the accomplishments of a local association in a small mountain village that, through the cooperation of its citizens, managed to bring electricity to the village, build water pumps (eliminating lengthy and extremely arduous walks up and down the mountain sides from the water source to the village), introduced water purification schemes, constructed kilometers of roads and bought ambulances to transport, most particularly, women experiencing difficult labours to a hospital[66] (the death rate of women giving birth remains distressingly high in Morocco). What is doubly reassuring for Mernissi is the links that have been established between immigrants – be they in France, Spain or elsewhere in Morocco – and their villages of origin, providing much needed capital and expertise. These local

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[66] All of which are critical when one considers that "two-thirds of people living in the country do not have access to drinking water, 87% are without electricity and 93% receive no medical care" (Ramonet).

associations have managed to accomplish in a relatively short period of time what the state had failed to deliver in over forty years of independence. Mernissi finds in all of this ample evidence for hope and the possibility of change in Morocco. Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut-Atlas is, in many respects, an ode in praise of that process. The frame in which democracy and democratic practices are presented in Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut-Atlas reveals a fascinating return to her previous preoccupations.

On the most obvious level, there is an emphasis on, and a celebration of, the local. Mernissi has moved from her more general and theoretical reflections on the democratic process, to the examination of very localized, and very concrete expressions of democracy in a Moroccan setting. Moreover, rather than anchoring these examples in an Islamic past, she now roots them in Morocco's Berber past: "si vous dites à Hadda et aux habitants de son village que la participation populaire, le droit positif fabriqué par les citoyens eux-mêmes, la transparence des comptes de la part des dirigeants, sont des articles d'importation [occidentaux], ils vous répondront que vous ignorez les vraies traditions berbères, tout simplement" (Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut-Atlas 112). Her formative grounding in finding ideals in the past would seem to have persisted. Disillusionment with Islam and Western democracy turns her toward yet another tradition that might serve as an ideal.

Mernissi qualifies this so-called "Berber democracy," and recognizes its short-comings, saying that "dans nos traditions arabes ou berbères, la solidarité de groupe a toujours eu une coloration tribale ou sectaire" (129). Furthermore, full-fledged membership to these nascent democratic processes was effectively restricted to men for, in order to have a voice and participate in the decision-making one had to own the wherewithall to combat tribal enemies (i.e. horse, weapons, munitions etc.).[67] Nevertheless, for Mernissi, it makes obvious sense to draw on the strengths and traditions of the local, now Berber, and to then engage in a process of modernizing those practices – "pour les faire fructifier, il faut les articuler dans des stratégies modernes," she writes (136), and notes that "la grande innovation de la démocratie à l'occidentale c'est précisément l'universalité, l'ouverture à tous, sans restrictions aucunes, ni religieuses, ni ethniques, ni de sexe" (129).

Mernissi's work remains driven by a desperate longing for connection and communication: communication between women, between men and women, between citizens, between citizens and the state, between states, and between East and West. This fundamental emphasis on communication has come full circle: interviews and letters form the basis of half

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[67] A practice which excluded the poor also, of course. Also excluded from tribal democracies were Jews and "étrangers" (135).

of Beyond the Veil, and Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut Atlas is structured around her discussions with people in the village. In a touching gesture, Mernissi's last work opens with a pledge to learn forty words of Berber before her next visit to the Atlas villages, and it closes not simply with a celebratory listing of those forty words, but with an equally enthralled account of her discovery that "je parlais le berbère sans le savoir. L'arabe dialectal est plein de mots berbères" a list of which she exuberantly shares with the reader (Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut Atlas 152).

This linguistic openness[68] seems to me to encapsulate what has remained constant throughout Mernissi's long professional career – her desire for dialogue and her belief that change, both personal and social, can only come about if such dialogue is established: "Nous pouvons [. . .]

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[68] Accompanied, I might add, with a marked aggressiveness towards the French language which appears in her later work – "Vous remarquerez assez rapidement que je prends des libertés inouïes avec la langue française," she writes in Êtes-vous vacciné contre le harem?, "Je dis Une écrivaine et Une Médecin lorsqu'il s'agit de la femme, je fabrique des mots nouveaux, etc. Le ministre Gaulois de la Francophonie serait très fâché, mais il aurait tort, car il doit accepter que l'internalisation de "Sa" langue implique la liberté des autres de l'adapter, de la modifier, de la recréer" (Êtes-vous vacciné contre le harem? fn 1, 11). And in an interview, Mernissi mentions that she wrote Dreams of Trespass in English because she wanted to "[s]'exiler dans une langue plus lointaine," and she reminds her interviewer that "le français est pour moi une langue étrangère" ("Fatima Mernissi par elle-même" 142).

réaliser [la pluralité] avec cet acquis scientifique dont l'essence est de nous permettre de communiquer, de tisser des dialogues infinis, de créer cette planète miroir où toutes les cultures si étranges peuvent enfin briller dans leur singularitées" (La peur-modernité 227).[69] For Mernissi, this is the promise of modernity. This sudden interest in the Berber language also reflects, however, a change in the direction of her gaze, away from the West, to a more introspective regard. Her tackling of the language is both a personal endeavour and a means of establishing a dialogue with a significant sector of Moroccan society,[70]

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[69] During the course of an interview, Gayatri Spivak's interlocutor asks if "it is possible to achieve a dialogue, an exchange? I think," her interviewer adds, "the attempt has been from our side to communicate to you something of our conditions of work." Spivak's reply to this challenge touches upon an aspect of Mernissi's problematic relationship with a certain idea of modernity: "that is the kind of position Jurgen Habermas articulates: a neutral communication situation of free dialogue. Well, it is not a situation that ever comes into being – there is no such thing. The desire for neutrality and dialogue, even as it should not be repressed, must always mark its own failure. To see how desire articulates itself, one must read the text in which that desire is expressed. The idea of neutral dialogue is an idea which denies history, denies structure, denies the positioning of subjects. I would try to look how, in fact, the demand for dialogue is articulated" (Spivak 72).

[70] "Comme tous les citadins, je me sens stupide de ne pas comprendre le berbère chaque fois quand je visite le Haut-Atlas" (Les Aït-Débrouille du Haut-Atlas 151).

acknowledging, at yet another level, the rich complexity of the society in which she lives. Remarkably this is the very site on which she founded her first work:

> The actual situation in modern Muslim Morocco will appear incoherent to anyone looking for the secure and comforting logic of Cartesian "rational behaviour." But if we discard childish frames of mind and try to grasp the complexity of a situation in which individuals act and reflect on their actions, responding to the disconcerting demands of the world around them, then what seems incoherent becomes intelligible in its existential context. (Beyond the Veil 12)

The tensions in Menissi's work arise from her attempt to wed the ideals of early Islam or the possibilities of Berber tradition with her uncritical adoption of the values of an idealized modernity. In The Veil and the Male Elite Mernissi writes that "We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy, and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported Western values, but is a true part of the Muslim tradition" (viii). In an earlier work, however, she says that "A new sexual order based on the absence of dehumanizing limitations of women's potential means the destruction of the traditional Muslim family. In this respect, fears associated with changes in the family and the

condition of women are justified" (Beyond the Veil 167). Although the two statements are not antithetical, Mernissi's argument that the "traditional Muslim family" is founded on misleading interpretations of the Qur'an and the Hadiths and therefore does not reflect true Muslim values is from a practical point of view a rather fine splitting of hairs. That such strategies do not yield much room to manœuvre is manifested in the contradictions and paradoxes that plague her work.

Unable to see any way around women's condition in the present Mernissi chooses to turn to the past and constructs a time when relations between men and women were ideal within Islam. But this retreat into history is, paradoxically, an ahistorical move for it overlooks over 1300 years of history – a time during which, of course, Islam and male-female relations have evolved a great deal in response to a wide-range of internal and external pressures and influences:

> the discourse of authenticity postulates a historical subject which is self-identical, essentially in continuity over time, and positing itself in essential distinction from other historical subjects. For the viability of a historical subject such as this, it is essential that its integrity must be maintained against a manifest backdrop of change of a very rapid and profound nature. It therefore follows that change

> should be conceived as contingent, impelled by inessential matters like external interference or internal subversion, the effects of which can only be faced with a reassertion of the essence of historical subjectivity. History therefore becomes an alternance in a continuity of decadence and health, and historio-graphical practice comes to consist in the writing of history as a form of classification of events under the two categories of intrinsic and extrinsic, the authentic and the imputed, the essential and the accidental. (Al-Azmeh 42)

A recent external influence which is not really addressed, nor its consequences acknowledged in Mernissi's work, was, of course, colonialism. Although, as I observed in the Introduction, the process of colonization in Algeria differed significantly from that of Morocco, certain aspects of the two processes were broadly similar. One of those was that "Islam was seen as the distinguishing feature" of the culture by the colonizing French (Yeğenoğlu 137). In response

> While formerly Islam was one element among others [of Algerian resistance to colonialism], it suddenly became a <u>nodal point</u> around which all the other signifiers condensed. It thus arrested the flow of other signifiers and dominated the colonized's field of discursivity by becoming the

> focus of their identity, and it was articulated in their effort to maintain their difference from the colonial oppressor. (Yeğenoğlu 137)

Although this did not take place in Morocco to the same extent, nevertheless, it remains for the most part true; that is, Moroccans now define themselves as Islamic in a way which was not the case prior to colonization. Confronted with that self-definition, Mernissi does not challenge it but rather seeks an alternative textual source. She is, in other words, caught. Her "retreat" is also a response to Western attitudes which perceive Islam as intrinsically discriminatory, backwards and inferior. Once again, the only way Mernissi feels she can counter these racist perceptions is to demonstrate that Islam's essence is not repressive, and that Islam is not intrinsically misogynist.

Likewise, her insistence that the equality of women holds the key to Morocco's economic development is in turn caught in a nationalist discourse that posits women's equality as beneficial to the nation's entry into progress and modernity. Discussing the articulation of nationalisms at the turn of the century in the face of colonialism, Yeğenoğlu argues that "the women's question was used as a point of leverage through which different positions were able to forge their nationalist projects; women thus became the medium through which other issues, such as those that pertain to national identity, were contested" (129). As a consequence, Yeğenoğlu continues,

> when women attempted to speak, they did not have an autonomous subject position from which they could articulate their question as women. On the contrary, their subject position as women was already subjected to other priorities constructed in the public domain. This did not mean that it was only men who spoke in the name of women; on the contrary, women took part in the debate, but always within terms and contexts which were already established by the discursive polarization in the political domain. (129-130)

This would seem to describe Mernissi's position well. On the one hand, her arguments fail the test of authenticity. Many identify her as a Western-style feminist whose "ravings" have nothing in common with Islam's "true" culture.[71] This labeling leads to her work being dismissed by those who doubt her theological scholarship and authority.[72] On the other hand, she is seen as an enthusiast for Western-style progress and a representative of a "rational" Islam capable of assimilating Western ideals.

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[71] A response she vividly recounts in Le harem politique (244-245).

[72] A comment I heard from several women in Morocco who admired her struggle but placed little credence and saw little value in her theological-historical discourse.

As Yeğenoğlu's work demonstrates, it is by no means a given that the problems of democracy and women's political and social rights are simply resolved with the adoption of the values of modernity. In fact, this very notion suggests the presence of an "authentic" modernity to which one could turn. This inability to be critical of modernity is the source of a number of paradoxes in Mernissi's work. Mernissi does not bring to her critical work what is so obviously present in Dreams of Trespass: the notion that personal and cultural identities are constructs involved in processes of constant negotiation with the people and the cultures around them. These identities are not free-floating signifiers engaged in a process of performative and playful reconstruction, but all of the figures Mernissi portrays in Dreams of Trespass and the women who speak in Doing Daily Battle do respond in multiple and resourceful ways to the changing world around them. Trapped within her reductionist binaries of an authentic Islam and an authentic condition of modernity, Mernissi fails to recognize the strategies being employed by Moroccan women today who neither stay at home in the harem nor turn to the West for guidance.

Mernissi has clearly not succeeded in resolving the paradoxes I have discussed, but the very oppositions she foregrounds in her works constitute a necessary first step towards finding a new space and spatial metaphor for gender relations in a postcolonial Islamic setting. Her constant

return to her primary concern, women's equality, endows her works with a staying power that will ensure that others will follow her footsteps and find alternative ways of conceptualizing gender relations in Morocco. Furthermore, her work, at times inadvertently, acknowledges and foregrounds the multiplicity of women's voices that exist in contemporary Morocco. Indeed, I am quite convinced that Mernissi's efforts have already helped to clear a space for a new generation of female writers.

Abdelkébir Khatibi: From Carpets to Calligraphy. Islamic Intersignification and Moroccan Cultural Expression

A great deal has been said about Khatibi's work over the years; along with Tahar Ben Jelloun and the Algerian writer Kateb Yacine, he has been written about more than any other North African francophone writer. In that sense, he holds a significant position within francophone postcolonial writing. Despite that fact, almost all of the critical writing that has appeared has been about his fictional work. Apart from what have now become the obligatory references to a couple of his essays from Maghreb Pluriel virtually nothing has been said about his non-fictional writing, although, in sheer volume, it is more significant than his fiction. These works – from La Blessure du nom propre published in 1974 to his Civilisation marocaine published in 1996, with his essay on the Moroccan painter Ahmed Cherkaoui (1976), L'art calligraphique arabe (1976), Maghreb Pluriel (1983) and Du signe à l'image: Le tapis marocain (1995) published along the way – create for Khatibi a space in which to play out, more explicitly than in his fictional works, his understandings of contemporary Moroccan culture. Whilst there can be no doubt that his fiction explores many of the same issues of personal and cultural identity (most notably in Amour bilingue) which commentators have often noted, there is a clear intellectual movement within his critical works which has remained hidden and untapped.

Khatibi's critical writings are among the most important articulations of postcolonialism in Morocco and provide insights that could well extend to other similar cultural settings.

I came across Khatibi's non-fictional writing rather by chance – I was working on an undergraduate essay when a computer search indicated that the University of Alberta library had a copy of a work by Khatibi on calligraphy. Already an enthusiast of Arabic calligraphy, I devoured the lush, richly illustrated work; but along the way I found myself drawn into Khatibi's commentaries. For one thing, his theoretical reflections on the meanings of calligraphy were more subtle, complex and rewarding than any I had previously read; for another, his writing was, without forfeiting any of its complexity, more accessible and coherent than any of his fictional works. As I read, I became aware of an intellectual link between his reflections on the theological, cultural and intellectual significances and significations of Islamic calligraphy and post-structuralist thought.

An additional experience encouraged me to examine Khatibi's non-fictional writings more carefully: the public launching in the spring of 1997 in Rabat of a work he co-edited entitled Civilisation marocaine: Arts et cultures. Initially, I was perplexed by the appearance of this work which focuses on such a localized cultural site (Morocco),

for it seemed to fly in the face of his pan-Maghrebi musings of Maghreb Pluriel. Listening to Khatibi describe the scope and ambitions of the work, however, (as well as presentations by several of the collection's contributors) I began to see a synthesis of ideas I had missed before. I realized that I had much digging to do, and indeed, as I looked into the matter in libraries in Rabat, spoke to writers, publishers and academics, and reflected on what I observed around me in Morocco, Civilisation marocaine began to make more and more sense. I slowly learnt that it was, in fact, a natural culmination of over twenty years of research, reflection and publication. For, as I probed, I learnt of the range of (non-fictional) material Khatibi had written – most of which I discuss in this chapter. Not only had he published a significant amount of work over the years in which he discussed and analyzed aspects of Moroccan culture, but the ground-work for these reflections was laid twenty years before in a collection of essays entitled La blessure du nom propre. In this volume he establishes the theoretical underpinnings for almost all of his subsequent non-fictional socio-cultural works and he sets the stage for over two decades of research and writing.

Published in 1974, La blessure du nom propre is made up of six essays; "Le cristal du texte," a relatively short introductory piece, is followed by essays on Moroccan proverbs, tattooing in Morocco, calligraphy, Le jardin parfumé by Nafzâwi and its language of sex and sexuality,

and finally a transcript of and commentary on, a Moroccan tale as orally recounted by an old Moroccan woman. The thread that links each of these essays is to be found in the book's opening essay – "Le cristal du texte."

> Crystal: *the regular polyhedral form, bounded by plane surfaces, which is the outward expression of a periodic or regularly repeating internal arrangement of atoms.* (*Dictionary of Geological Terms, American Geological Institute, 1962*)

> Le livre rêvé aura voltigé, en ses instants les plus intenses, autour de quelques motifs insistants: mouvement giratoire, blessure du nom propre, ciselé volatil, frappe oblique, point/pointe. Et en cette agitation un peu oisive, les signes migrateurs – d'un système sémiotique (comme le tatouage ou la calligraphie) à un autre (comme l'écriture) – auront retenu un mouvement interrogatif, sans cesse provocateur.
>
> D'un système sémiotique à un autre: quelque chose comme l'intersémiotique existe-t-il? (La blessure du nom propre 11).

Khatibi has distilled in these opening lines the theoretical impulse which has fueled and directed so much of his subsequent reflection. "Le cristal du texte" is a remarkable essay for it articulates in both its form and

content a radical line of inquiry, from its unconventional grouping together of cultural expressions previously considered disparate (e.g. tattooing and calligraphy), to its enigmatic language. It is, in many respects a manifesto of intent in which Khatibi introduces a number of critical elements and lays out the topography of his investigative terrain: (1) the suggestion in the essay's first paragraph (quoted above), made explicit later, that his is an inquiry into the nature of Islamic semiosis – "En effet, les systèmes sémiotiques ici présentés s'inscrivent notoirement par rapport à l'Islam et à sa sémiotique fondamentale" (16); (2) that it is a study interested in the expressions of popular culture[73]: "les textes et les systèmes sémiotiques ici retenus appartiennent tous à la culture arabe, et particulièrement à la culture populaire marocaine" (13). The latter is particularly significant, as we shall see, as is the link he makes between "culture populaire marocaine" and Islam's "sémiotique fondamentale." But in "Le cristal du texte" he also presents the ambition of his writing and its style, over and above addressing specific issues. That is, he is describing a writing that will be replete with slippery, evasive signifiers which question and provoke, and which will also seek to communicate at a non-cognitive level. In other words, Khatibi's writing, whilst exploring

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[73] By which he means culture as practiced by the majority in Morocco.

very serious issues of cultural identity, will replicate, in its form, some of the ambiguity he ascribes to issues of signification and identity.

The essay's focal point is the concept of the "intersigne," the definition of which is at once self-evident – a sign which migrates from one semiotic system to another – and enigmatic, for, when considered carefully, it is not at all obvious what this might actually mean. As one reads through the essay, furthermore, it becomes apparent that the original concept is not Khatibi's, but rather one he has drawn from an Islamic exegetical tradition which has always understood the sign to be polysemic: a tradition rooted in its understanding of the Qur'anic sign: "Car le Coran," Khatibi writes, "et c'est là son extrême originalité – se conçoit comme une théorie radicale du signe, de la Parole et de l'Écriture; al-qur'ân: lecture, déchiffrement et récitation du signe révélé" (17).[74] For Khatibi, the

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[74] A translation of the meanings of the word "qur'an" which can signify both the act of reading as well as the act of reciting. Sura 96 of the Qur'an (the first to be revealed to Muhammad) begins with the exhortation "Read in the name of your Lord, who created/Created man from an embryo;/Read, for your Lord is most beneficient,/Who taught by the pen,/Taught man what he did not know." This Sura holds a particularly significant place in Khatibi's intellectual makeup and is one he often cites. It must be kept in mind that this injunction from God was directed to an illiterate man who was a member of a largely illiterate society. For Khatibi, this command to read is a call to intellectual engagement with that which is said, as well as a directive to ensure

radical nature of the Qur'anic sign lies in its intrinsically intersemiotic nature, and he locates this intersemiosis in the extraordinary manner in which the Word is revealed:

> Ce qu'on désigne par l'impératif de Gabriel ordonnant à Muhammad de lire et de répéter le Nom propre d'Allah en "ouvrant la poitrine," c'est bien cette théorie de souffle qui traverse le corps (dans le sens strict: le Coran descend dans le corps), et le sépare, le plie en signes distincts, afin que le croyant éprouve ses fibres comme autant de feuilles cristallines du texte. L'intersigne prophétique est un souffle, un discours extatique, dont la plasticité est régie, comptabilisée, voilée/dévoilée dans le corps [. . .]. (17)

The Qur'anic sign is understood as being plural and intersemiotic for it simultaneously contains the oral, the written, and the corporeal; in one defining moment, the Qur'an is delivered into Muhammad as he is commanded to read and recite.

Plural and intersemiotic, the Qur'anic sign is also enigmatic and eludes full comprehension. Indeed, complete

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that all have equal access to the Word and are able to engage with it, intellectually and spiritually.

understanding can be God's alone: "Allah tient en son sein l'interprétation des signes et en même temps il affirme la clarté de son message. Le Coran désigne ainsi le signe dans sa double face de voilement/dévoilement" (18). It is this enigmatic aspect combined with its intersemiotic character which lends the Qur'anic sign its "migrating" quality and which imbues it with "un mouvement interrogatif, sans cesse provocateur." So that, when Khatibi writes in the passage cited earlier of "le livre rêvé" filled with "les signes migrateurs" which collectively form an alternative semiotic system he coins "l'intersémiotique," he is also, it seems to me, describing the Qur'an (which was revealed as Muhammad slept).[75] It is this movement and provocation that interests Khatibi, and it is in line with that "provocative" tradition that he situates his work.

From this understanding of the Qur'anic sign (which, as we have seen is not Khatibi's conception; it is what he does with this understanding that is new) arise a number of intellectual and spiritual consequences. For one thing, the body is re-introduced as an integral aspect of spirituality. If the Word was revealed to Muhammad in the body, there can be no separation of the Body from the Word; an exclusion of

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[75] "The earliest accounts of Muhammad point to the fact that the experience [of revelation] had occurred in or was accompanied by a state of vision or quasi-dream, for the Prophet is reported to have stated after narrating the experience, 'Then I woke up.'" (Rahman, Islam 13).

the senses leads to an impoverished and incomplete relationship to the world (to God's creation). For Khatibi the repression of the body is a later, political, development within Islam which runs counter to what he sees as the core of the Qur'anic message (his analysis crosses paths with a great deal of feminist thought on this point). His concern strikes me, however, as more cultural and spiritual than political (and here he follows a path quite separate from Mernissi, for example). His thinking is, in fact, consistent with, and clearly inspired by, mystical conceptions of God and Beauty, in which Beauty becomes not merely an expression of God but proof of God's very existence, an "æsthetic proof" as it is known (Papadopoulo 44).[76] Such thinking does not accord with more orthodox thought which "defines God by the Will, because what strikes the Ash'arites[77] about the God of the Koran is his

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[76] The Islamic art critic Papadopoulo argues that this originates in "the Platonism which imbues all of Muslim thought" (44): "Succinctly put, the essential lesson of Greek thought is that what counts above all else in nature as in man is the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, three aspects of a single essence in a doctrine predicated on the conviction that God is Intelligence" (Papadopoulo 44).

[77] The name of a dominant school of orthodox thought founded by the theologian al-Ash'ari (873-935). Montgomery Watt writes that al-Ash'ari "was not the first to try to apply kalam or rational argument to the defence of orthodox doctrine [. . . but] he seems to have been the first to do this in a way acceptable to a large body of orthodox opinion" (694).

omnipotence, his limitless absolute liberty, a liberty of indifference: the True, the Beautiful, and the Good are no more than a contingent creation of God who could just as well have made others and who could revoke them at any time" (Papadopoulo 44). Khatibi recognizes this dimension of the Qur'anic message and writes: "Allah n'est pas un Dieu qui donne son amour (comme dans le christianisme): il demande au croyant une complète soumission (islam) au texte coranique. Cette violente soumission au texte va conditionner tout le statut de l'écriture comme corps, comme intersigne divin" (La blessure du nom propre 18). But he contends that as much as the body may be the site of punishment and torment, it is also the site of revelation: "Entendons-nous: dans le savoir du texte, sa gemme à plusieurs facettes, particulièrement ici en relation avec le corps divin comme intersigne, lieu où le pouvoir de jouissance change de couleur comme à l'approche d'un poison" (16). It is in the space between the two — "blessure" and revelation — that Khatibi's work is to be done:

> "Sommes-nous grecs? sommes-nous orientaux?" Singulariser cette double identité vacillante fait du texte un être orphelin, un être de l'exil. C'est dans l'intervalle lui-même nomade (d'une telle identité) que le destin se désigne et se blesse. (16)

The plural and intersemiotic nature of the Qur'anic sign invites one to conceive identity (individual and

cultural) as an "oscillation entre le non-sens et le signe pur" (12) in which "le signe pur" is absolute clarity and singularity of signification, and "le non-sens" is the lack of signification. Khatibi works against a certain fatalistic outlook regarding individual identity and fate. Continuing with his explication of Ash'arite theology, Papadopoulo writes that

> Just as God sees the past, present, and future as one, so too He beholds the entire universe simultaneously from inside and outside. This eternal vision of God implies Destiny (Kismet): everything is written in advance in the book of human actions, and because God is all-powerful, this inevitably entails a belief in predetermination of all that happens [. . .]. (Papadopoulo 44)

Khatibi's response to such an outlook is clear:

> Il faut donc déplacer le dicton hindou qui dit: ton Nom propre est ton destin, en ne considérant plus la question de l'identité comme une fatalité divine, fixée à un centre et à une origine, mais en faisant jouer le Nom propre selon le cristal du texte: ce miroitement de l'être se transformant, se combinant au feuilletement du sens. (La blessure du nom propre 14)

If the text is the Qur'an and "le cristal" is its plural, intersemiotic nature, then it is through the intersign that such a "displacement" is possible:

> Intersigne signifie: marque, indice, "relation mystérieuse entre deux faits" (le Robert); pour nous: cristal sanguin à nombreuses facettes, à pointe régulière, et dont l'irisation vitreuse et fragile blesse le corps et le Nom propre, en réinscrivant autrement la symétrie cristalline: identité/différence. (16)

In selecting the term "cristal" Khatibi has chosen his imagery and metaphor carefully. His work is not an invitation for random, arbitrary readings of the Qur'an; he is not suggesting, by any means, that the text can mean whatever we may want it to mean. A crystal is, after all, "the outward expression" of a "regularly repeating arrangement of atoms." On the other hand, its "outward expression" is multiple, and that "polyhedral" form refracts light in multiple ways, appearing to change form and colour with each turn and with each new point of reference. The image we have of it changes with every new angle we adopt, and yet it remains a "regularly repeating arrangement of atoms." Moreover, our understanding of that internal arrangement does not remove our sense of wonder as we gaze at its beauty.

If echoes of Derrida can be heard in these aspects of Khatibi's reflections it will come as no surprise to read

that Khatibi explicitly mentions Derrida's influence on his work. In fact, the passage quoted earlier – "Sommes-nous grecs? sommes-nous orientaux?" – is prefaced by the following: "Au seuil de cette désappropriation de soi, se dessine une halte théorique et, à l'instar de J. Derrida, nous pouvons nous interroger: 'Sommes-nous grecs? sommes-nous orientaux?'" (16). And a page before he writes that "l'attention portée à la culture arabe et à ses théories du signe nous rend plus sensible fondamentalement à l'œuvre de J. Derrida" (15). This latter passage is particularly significant for it makes clear that it is the parallels Khatibi finds between Derrida's work and Islamic discourse regarding the sign that interests him and which caught his attention. Khatibi's reflections on the nature of the Qur'anic sign led him to explore post-structuralist writings where he found surprising echoes of the writings of early Arab grammarians. A key intellectual inspiration for this endeavour is Derrida's De la grammatologie; specifically, what interests Khatibi is Derrida's critique of logocentrism's dichotomy between "phonie" and "graphie": "l'histoire de la vérité, de la vérité de la vérité, a toujours été, à la différence près d'une diversion métaphorique dont il nous faudra rendre compte, l'abaissement de l'écriture et son refoulement hors de la parole 'pleine'" (Derrida, De la grammatologie 12).

Within the Western metaphysic, since at least the writings of Aristotle, it has been argued that the origin of

signification lies in the voice, of which the text is merely a muffled echo. Khatibi argues that "dans le savoir arabe, le signe est scindé, fissuré autrement" (La blessure du nom propre 182):

> Écriture souveraine, la calligraphie dénonce, subvertit, renverse la substance même de la langue en la transportant en un espace autre, une combinatoire autre, qui soumettent la langue à une variation surdéterminée. C'est ce mouvement vacillant entre phonie et graphie que nous interrogeons ici. (La blessure du nom propre 177)

Khatibi found in post-structuralist theories a shared concern with the implications of such a split sign. Terry Eagleton describes post-structuralist thinking in the following way:

> Meaning is the spin-off of a potentially endless play of signifiers, rather than a concept tied firmly to the tail of a particular signifier. [. . .] If you want to know the meaning (or signified) of a signifier, you can look it up in the dictionary; but all you will find will be yet more signifiers, whose signifieds you can in turn look up, and so on. [. . .] signifiers keep transforming into signifieds and vice versa, and you will never arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier in itself. [. . .]
>
> Since the meaning of a sign is a matter of what

> the sign is not, its meaning is always in some sense absent from it too. Meaning, if you like, is scattered or dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers: it cannot be easily nailed down, it is never fully present in any one sign alone, but is rather a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together. (Eagleton 127-128)

Far from imposing contemporary theory on Arabic grammar, Khatibi suggests that coincidentally post-structuralism articulated the theory of the sign as it is manifest in the Qur'an:

> Un des secrets du Coran est d'avoir transformé la lettre comme signe pur en un argument rhétorique sur-signifiant, et d'avoir fissuré le signe même de son message, de son énonciation, de telle façon que pour l'écoute du croyant le sens demeure à jamais suspendu, lointain et vagabond. (La blessure du nom propre 180)

In other words, although many speak of Khatibi's work as post-modern (and, in many respects it is), it is important to realize that the post-modern nature of his discourse is not a facile adoption of current Western critical and philosophical thinking, but is rather an understanding by Khatibi that there are parallels between an Islamic discourse of the sign and certain currents in Western thinking. Furthermore, as he makes clear, he makes

use of specific concepts which assist him in thinking through the issues of identity and signification.

It is this probing analysis of identity that Khatibi brings to his discussion of Moroccan popular cultural production. He challenges conventional interpretations of Islamic æsthetics which, he argues, have not grasped the significance of the intersign. The consequences of an impoverished conceptualization of the Qur'anic sign is perhaps nowhere more evident (in the context we are considering) than in the manner in which Moroccan cultural production has been dismissed and/or diminished by observers on all sides. The dismissal of the "minor" arts, as the art historian Papadopoulo describes them in his magnum opus Islam and Muslim Art, is symptomatic of the assumptions Khatibi critiques: "Aesthetically, the minor arts of Islam, magnificent as their creations often are, brought nothing new to what we already know of Muslim figurative and non-figurative art, so we shall survey them only briefly" (Papadopoulo 188). Sure enough, in just three and a half pages (of a six hundred plus page book), he manages to "survey" ceramics, metalwork, woodcarving, ivories, enameled glassware, textiles and carpets!

One of the aims of Khatibi's work is to re-instate popular cultural production as signifying as deeply as the "major" art forms such as miniatures, mosaics, poetry and architecture: "Dès lors," he writes in Civilisation marocaine, "plus de différence hiérarchique entre les arts

dits majeurs et les arts dits mineurs" (12). The notion of the intersign makes it possible for Khatibi to redress that traditional and hierarchical view. But his work goes well beyond a re-classification of the arts; his articulation of the intersign and his analysis of the multiple sites of Moroccan cultural production opens up an avenue for thinking through a postcolonial cultural identity. His vision aims to provide the type of syntheses that have eluded earlier formulations of Morocco's postcolonial condition. His notion of double critique and of the intersign free him from binary patterns of thought and afford him the possibility of embracing the seemingly incongruous and paradoxical. In the process, his syncretic view turns to what has often been relegated to the margins of cultural expression.

In the opening sentence from the introduction of Du signe à l'image: Le tapis marocain Khatibi introduces several themes which will be worked and re-worked throughout the book: "Pendant que nous préparions cet ouvrage, qui est entre vos mains, je n'ai cessé de penser à la correspondance du jardin, du tapis et du paradis, comme à l'une des plus métaphoriques que l'art ait produites en terre d'Islam" (13). To the casual observer there would appear to be nothing particularly striking about this sentence but in fact it encapsulates both a cultural critique and a new vision.

For one thing, he immediately situates the Moroccan carpets within an Islamic context. As obvious as this might

seem – 99% of the Moroccan population is, after all, Muslim – this is not normally the case. The text of a recent travel guide provides a telling example:

> Morocco's Berber origins and superimposed Islamic civilization have produced a doubly diverse culture that is reflected in its handwoven carpets. The Moroccan carpet industry developed in cities, which were open to Oriental influence, during the 18th century. [. . .] Berber carpets from the Middle and High Atlas and from the Haouz plain have much more distant, ethnic origins [. . .]. Today, they still epitomize the inventive vitality of the Berber people. (Morocco: Everyman Guides 74)

The guide further notes that "Rabat carpets belong to a group of Islamic carpets in the urban tradition" (74), whereas no mention of "Islamic" traditions is ever made in reference to the Berber carpets. Indeed, the passage quoted is a fine distillation of a whole catalogue of prejudices and cultural assumptions. The juxtaposition of "Berber origins" and "superimposed Islamic civilization," implies that an "authentic," "original" culture, exists in sharp contrast from an "inauthentic" culture. This recalls and reinforces the colonial view that Islam was imposed on the indigenous people and that it rests as a mere veneer over an enduring pagan culture. The separation of urban and rural cultures is also aligned along differences between Islamic

and Berber culture. This line of thought is further encouraged by the comment that the urban designs were under "Oriental" influence, i.e. not native to the country and therefore less authentic, in fact, barely Moroccan at all, whereas Berber designs date from time immemorial.

It might seem too easy to criticize a travel guide, normally not a source one turns to for serious (or even accurate) commentary but this is a guide – originally published by one of France's most respectable and literary publishers, Gallimard – which presents itself as a serious cultural artifact in the finest bourgeois tradition and which notes that "numerous specialists and academics have contributed" to its contents (8).[78] Moreover, the guide's general bias against seeing carpets as an integral part of Moroccan art and culture is precisely what Khatibi aims to rectify.

Khatibi notes that "Bien que catalogué, le tapis est peu connu, lorsqu'il n'est pas méconnu" (Du signe à l'image 14). That is, apart from studies which have identified and

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[78] The Lonely Planet guide to Morocco reproduces much the same discourse: "Rabat is reputed to be one of the best centres and maintains a tradition inspired by the carpet-makers of the Middle East. [. . .] Outside Rabat, most of the carpets and rugs are the work of Berber tribes, each of which [. . .] pass down certain designs and colour combinations" (Morocco: A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit 110, emphases mine). The lack of suggestion as to how these designs might have come about participates in the idea of a timeless culture which simply passes traditions on intact, generation after generation.

listed different weaves, designs, materials and regional variations, there does not exist a work which has seriously studied the history of the Moroccan carpet, let alone attempted to discuss what it might mean to speak of a Moroccan carpet as an "Islamic" artifact.

Take for example a collection of essays and images published by the Textile Museum in Washington D.C. on the occasion of a major exhibition of Moroccan carpets, entitled From the Far West: Carpets and Textiles of Morocco. The work's introduction notes that these carpets are "fundamentally the product of an Islamic culture" (Pickering 15) but nowhere – neither in the introduction nor in any of the catalogue's six brief essays – is there a discussion of what this might mean. In other words, "Islamic" here functions as an empty signifier, a gratuitous acknowledgment that they originate from a Muslim country, as though merely mentioning it were self-explanatory. Or as though the mere mention of it functions as a code which says "you know, different, exotic, other," a suspicion confirmed when the introduction quickly drifts into mystification and "orientalist" fantasizing:

> As you turn the pages of this book you will find that they take you beyond any other place you have ever been. Think of it as an adventure into a land of desert warriors and distant caravans, majestic mountain peaks and ranges, fertile plains and vast stretches of the Sahara, exotic walled

> cities and Berber fortress towns, of a strong but friendly people and, best of all, of a world filled with the fresh and living colors of their rugs and art. (15)

The only contribution in this collection which attempts to discuss the carpets beyond mere cataloguing is by Bert Flint. A Dutch art lecturer who has lived in Morocco for over thirty years, Flint writes that "In the weavings and rugs illustrated in this catalogue we are faced with a highly elaborate language made up of a vocabulary of forms and colors combined by a structure in a grammar that reflects the organization of time and space" (57). There is here, at least, a recognition of a more profound signification than "a taste for ornament," a point he makes explicit a page later:

> This is far from the naive expression of some folk art that has come under the influence either of the figurative art traditions of Western Europe or of some other alien art form, and it is equally free of the excesses of technical virtuosity seen in some oriental rugs. It may be considered art in the true sense of the word with the accent on creativity. It's very important to admit that the æsthetic response evoked in us by many of these rugs and weavings can be of the same quality that contemporary abstract art can produce. (58)

Flint wants these carpets to be considered as art objects as opposed to objects of folkloric interest, a point Khatibi also raises and which I shall discuss shortly. Note, however, that Flint's comments express the same subtle suggestion of the timelessness and authenticity of Berber expression that must do battle with the pernicious influence of "alien art forms" – which, in this context, can only be understood as Arab and Islamic. Flint also draws an absolute divide between rural and urban Moroccan culture. "One of the most striking aspects of Moroccan art and culture," he writes, "is that peasant and nomadic traditions have lived vigorously alongside urban traditions" (57), and his essay only discusses rurally produced carpets with no mention whatsoever of Rabati rugs. He also writes that "Even for the decoration of their mosques these peasants maintained their independence of an urban style that all over the Moslem world was associated almost automatically with mosques and Islam" (57), suggesting, much as the Gallimard travel guide did, that the rural population is not really Muslim, and that it has continued on with its age-old æsthetic tradition – a "language [. . .] learned in the same way as the spoken mother tongue" (58) – despite the "superimposition" of Islam.

The difficulty here is obviously not the suggestion that the Berber people and culture played a significant part in the shaping of Moroccan culture; nor is it the suggestion that rural and urban cultural expressions differ – that is

the case everywhere. The problem is the insistence that the two – rural and urban – basically have nothing in common, which, in turn, leads to the view, as we have already seen, that rural cultural expression is not Islamic at all. It is this pervasive, neo-colonial assumption that Khatibi takes to task.

As I noted earlier, Khatibi's opening sentence describes the Moroccan carpet as a distinctly Islamic cultural expression, a perspective introduced even earlier, in the book's epigraph, consisting of verses from the Qur'an:

> à cause de leur effort sur terre, satisfaits,
> dans un jardin superbe,
> où ils n'entendront nul caquet,
> où sera une source vive,
> où seront des lits surélevés,
> des cratères posés,
> des coussins rangés,
> des tapis étendus.
>
> (Le Coran, sourate "al-Ghashiyah" [The Overpowering], LXXXVIII, versets 9-16)

What is meant, or might be meant, when Khatibi speaks of an "Islamic" art? It is important to realize that he is not referring to a geographical origin, that is, art from an Islamic country; nor does it have to do with the fact that the maker of the carpets are presumably Muslim. Khatibi's

understanding of Islamic æsthetics can be gleaned from the following passage:

> Cette correspondance [du jardin, du tapis et du paradis] a émerveillé autant les tapissiers d'Orient que ses enlumineurs et miniaturistes. En témoignent de nombreux jardins-paradis, tissés ou peints avec une très grande finesse.
>
> En rêvant à cette imagerie, on s'aperçoit que cette sensation de paix, d'heureuse quiétude et de temps aboli — suggérée par le paradis — émane d'un plaisir absolu provoqué par la décoration. Que l'ornementation produise un tel effet sur l'homme, cela paraîtra évident ou énigmatique. Mais une des énigmes de l'art ne réside-t-elle pas dans les variations de l'apparence et ses chatoiements? (Du signe à l'image 13)

Khatibi's reference to miniatures, made again a few paragraphs later when he writes that "Certains cartons de tapis, faut-il le rappeler, ont été dessinés par les miniaturistes de Cour" (14), is significant in two respects: for one, miniatures are considered by many as the pinnacle of Islamic artistic achievement. By associating carpets with miniatures Khatibi "elevates" the carpet from the "minor" status it normally holds in the pantheon of artistic merit, into the breezy heights of the "major" art of the miniature. In that sense the gesture is strategic; but in challenging the ideological distinction between "high" and

"low" Khatibi is not calling into question the profound æsthetic and spiritual dimension of the art of the miniature. Rather, he is suggesting that carpets signify in much the same manner – with all the power, beauty and spiritual import that have traditionally been granted to miniatures. This constitutes a radical reconfiguring of Islamic æsthetics, of cultural production in the Islamic world in general, and in Morocco in particular.

In an important essay on Islamic æsthetics included in Maghreb Pluriel ("Vertiges") Khatibi refers the reader to "le remarquable travail de A. Papadopoulo," to which he owes "plusieurs remarques" (236 fn.1). In the context of our discussion here, the key element Khatibi takes from Papadopoulo's analysis is the idea that the miniatures reflect a cosmological vision which shapes the very form and appearance of the pieces. More specifically, it determines their highly abstract quality:

> The compositional method [of a miniature] aspired to construct the microcosm of the art work just as God had constructed the macrocosm of the universe, that is, for and by Man and with the aid of the platonic Idea-Numbers or, more precisely, with the circles of the heavens that become progressively smaller as they approach Earth. Such a descending and diminishing series of circles constitutes nothing more or less than a spiral. (Papadopoulo 101)

The particularities of Papadopoulo's analysis of the presence of the spiral form in all miniatures is not relevant to an understanding of Khatibi's vision. The focal point is the very considered and coherent æsthetic rooted in an interpretation of Islam's early edicts against the representation of living forms. The Islamic art historian, Oleg Grabar, observes that "at some time around the middle of the eighth century Islamic religious tradition in part or as a whole developed a hitherto unknown opposition to representations" (The Formation of Islamic Art 86-87). This opposition, he argues, lies neither in the Qur'an nor in the nature of the Qur'anic text which, with its lack of narrative structure does not lend itself to illustrations. Furthermore, he claims that theological opposition to visual representation came after the fact: "this avoidance of or reluctance toward representations," which was initially restricted to religious buildings, "spread beyond the realm of official art into private art. By the end of the eighth century," he continues, "Muslim thinkers were asking themselves why they made this shift, and they answered by going back to incidental passages of the Koran and by reinterpreting the life of the Prophet" (97). What led to that initial disinclination to visual interpretation in Islamic æsthetics was a reaction to an already highly developed and sophisticated visually signifying system in the Christian world. There was, in a sense, no way to compete on those terms; and so, in order to establish a

definite and discrete sense of visual identity Muslim artists simply changed the terms. For Grabar then, "precise historical circumstances, not ideology or some sort of mystical ethnic character, led to the Muslim attitude" (99).

As described by Papadopoulo, the miniatures both circumvented these strictures and found the means of interpreting and reflecting the spirit underlying the turn away from mimesis:

> When the artists for the first time, and with full awareness of what they were doing, turned their backs on the principle of imitation of nature which had been the dogma of all the arts since Greek antiquity, they precipitated a fundamental revolution: they were now confronted with the fact that what counts in a work of art is not imitation of nature or even verisimilitude [. . .] but rather the pictorial space of the miniature with its forms and colors assembled into a certain order. [. . .] From then on, the primary concern of the Muslim painter was to be with the organization of that autonomous pictorial world, the tiny cosmos of the miniature in which everything had to be sufficiently lavish to seduce the eye and at the same time necessary, necessary not on the level of illustration but autonomously, in terms of structure, and independently of

> subject, anecdote, verisimilitude, and optical illusion. (96)

Some of the attributes of this deliberate inverisimilitude were lack of perspective, artificial arrangement of figures, temporal and spatial compression in which sequenced events appear to occur simultaneously and side by side, a "horror of the void," unrealistic coloration, among others. In other words, the art of the miniature was remarkably abstract. For Papadopoulo the æsthetic of the miniature lies in its playing out of the idea of inverisimilitude according to certain mathematical laws limited to a privileged few. Papadopoulo concludes that "By virtue of the very splendor of its colors, the polyphony of their relationships, the beauty of a pictorial world whose structures are marked by the faces of men and women and the mathematical curves that link them, a miniature can truly be said to bear witness deeply and in its very essence to Beauty and, therefore, to God" (122).

Interestingly, there are moments when Papadopoulo's writings hint at the idea of the intersign: "All the various surfaces or color areas in a picture are involved in never-ending dialogue with each other and all others, [. . . and] in other fields as well, notably in architecture as regards the use and placement of decorative panels with geometrical motifs, arabesques, or calligraphy" (109). What clouds his intellectual vision at this point is his elitist perspective which prevents him from seeing carpets, for example, as

anything other than a beautifully crafted, yet minor, art. Papadopoulo is therefore left with a thesis that begins and ends (more or less) with the miniature, and, although what he has to say about the art of the miniature is insightful, it is decidedly limited.

Khatibi, who is both a populist and a sensualist, responds with the intersign. The corporeal foundation of the intersign simultaneously provides a way out of the cerebral exclusivity of Papadopoulo's analysis and dissolves his hierarchical ranking of the various arts (a bias he is far from alone in holding, of course). Hence Khatibi's insistence on the physical and sensual throughout the introduction to Du signe à l'image.[79]

In the opening sentence he speaks of the garden, the image of which he associates with "un plaisir absolu;" that the carpet "vous touche du regard," "invite votre corps;"

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[79] In the spirit of Khatibi's approach, reproductions of two Moroccan carpets, as well as of calligraphy and a painting by Cherkaoui have been included as appendices without analytical commentary. All of the images reproduced are taken from Khatibi's books in which he does not comment on them explicitly. It is important to keep in mind that Khatibi is not arguing that there is a direct corollary between the forms found in miniatures, for example, and the geometric configurations found in Moroccan carpets, but rather in the effect that each has which, he argues, is shared. His deployment of Papadopoulo's analyses is, therefore, a partial one for he is approaching these works of art from within an æsthetic system of qualification which places an emphasis on the totality of the work and its effects.

and he speaks of the "sensation de sérénité" the carpets induce (13). Significantly, when he addresses their creation, he mentions the hands of the weavers, the work of which "[le] regarde," a gaze that "entre à son tour dans [sa] vision," and "circule dans la trame de [son] désir" (14). In other words, Khatibi's starting-point is the body, and it is from the body that his reflections begin. This sensuous response to the carpet initiates and prompts his reflection on the shapes and forms and colours of the carpets: "Cette sensation de sérénité que réveille en nous cet art est, pour la connaissance, une subtile combinaison de formes et de couleurs, un vaste laboratoire de signes" (13). The mysterious signifying of the intersign begins through the body: "la fête du regard nous prépare à un admirable dialogue entre différents arts" (13). Khatibi is, in fact, unrelenting in his insistence on the body's profound and fundamental role as the intermediary between ornamental surface and spiritual depth:

> Au premier coup d'œil, on ne verrait dans ce tapis qu'une composition élémentaire de formes, de couleurs, de signes. Mais à supposer que cette imagination géométrale soit si élémentaire, si liée à la préhistoire du corps, si archaïque, il conviendrait pour ces raisons de traduire cette construction de formes imaginaires, de lui donner un lieu pensé et pensant dans la topographie de l'imaginaire. (14)

But the invitation to non-verbal, non-cognitive signification does not, and is not meant to, preclude analysis; for Khatibi the two are interconnected:

> On pourrait, dans un premier temps, analyser la composition géométrique-chromatique-symbolique qui articule le code de fabrication et de combinatoire. Ce premier espace – que le regard touche sans en percer le secret – est saisi par des unités de base, des stoïchéa, qui circulent de tapis en tapis et, au-delà, dans d'autres espaces: au-delà qui va de la poterie au tatouage, par exemple. (14)

Ironically, Khatibi has borrowed this idea of the stoïchéa [creative atoms], which in his writing is tied to the functioning of the intersign, from Papadopoulo.[80]

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[80] The foundations of which, in turn, lie in philosophy, as Grabar explains: "The second theme [of early Islamic thought], which originated in Hellenic thought and became one of the central explanations of reality in the Muslim world, is known as atomism. Its central tenet is that all things are made up of and distinguished by various combinations of equal units. According to the faith of Islam, there is no compulsory, natural need that physical reality remain the same, and it is a divine miracle that the same compositions reappear. Since the artist must avoid imitating God or competing with him, he becomes free to recompose the units of nature he knows in any way he sees fit, and the more arbitrary and absurd the better" (The Formation of Islamic Art 203).

Sensuousness and intersignification may lie on the surface, but Khatibi does not see the surface as "merely" ornamental, in the derogatory sense with which the term is usually used. On the contrary, he argues that the surface effect is an aspect of all artistic production. Khatibi elaborates on what he means when he speaks of ornamentation:

> Au spectateur, au regardant, le tapis offre un moment d'identité a-temporelle. Peu à peu l'espace s'anime dans la ressemblance: mosaïque ou broderie. Qu'importe ce que le tapis rappelle à la mémoire! C'est ce déplacement de signe en signe, c'est ce mouvement, ce rythme qui provoque notre enchantement. Ainsi vibre la troisième dimension. Bel équilibre et gaieté du coloris qui nous forcent à rêver, et peut-être à mieux penser. Comme tout tableau plastique, il nous renvoie à notre intimité la plus chatoyante, tamisée de figures, de lignes, de points et de points de fuite. L'art ornemental se reconnaît à cette qualité décorative, qui n'est ni pause ni transparence, ni profondeur opaque. (105)

Moreover, he identifies in carpets the very attributes Papadopoulo found in miniatures: "L'art du tapis se distingue par une correspondance entre la matière, le coloris et les motifs, une composition souvent symétrique et un répertoire de signes codés. Cet art ornemental est à la fois géométrique, abstrait et figural" (121). What is

signified is not to be understood as literal but an effect, an emotion, a physical, emotional, and metaphysical response: "Dessinant une fleur ou un arbre, le tapis le représente, comme le suggère S. Mallarmé: 'Peindre, non pas la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.'" (121). Khatibi speaks of this effect throughout Du signe à l'image as mystical. His explications point to the play of intersigns and, by extension, a connection between the Moroccan carpets and an Islamic æsthetics that cuts across many forms of representation.

The intertwining of the mystical and the physical is equally pronounced in Khatibi's discussion of Ahmed Cherkaoui's paintings. Indeed, I suspect that Khatibi's intense discussions with Cherkaoui played a significant role in his own intellectual development.

Ahmed Cherkaoui (1934-67), a contemporary of Khatibi's, was a painter whose work has had an enormous impact on the development of painting in Morocco and well beyond. His influence can, in part, be attributed to the fact that his work struggled with a key question faced by artists throughout the Arab world: how can one find a space for an æsthetic vision between tradition and modernity?

In 1961, both Cherkaoui and Khatibi had returned to Morocco, having spent time in France studying in Paris –

Cherkaoui from 1956-60[81] and Khatibi from 1958-61.[82] Returning to a country which had only just obtained its independence from France in 1956, it is not surprising that the question of cultural identity was at the forefront of their thoughts: "J'ai connu Ahmed Cherkaoui en 1961. Nous nous interrogions sur la culture nationale, sur la quête d'un art rendu à sa question radicale, celle de reprendre racine et d'indiquer un cheminement différent" (Khatibi, "Envol des racines" 45). But finding such a path is obviously not an easy task. On one side lay the barren route of nostalgic nationalism:

> les élites des pays encore sous domination occidentale défendent l'idée d'une culture nationale, c'est-à-dire une positivité qui n'est que la marque idéologique de la petite-bourgeoisie. Au nom de la culture nationale, on censure, on réprime les valeurs de la culture populaire, qui sont moins logographiques, plus sensibles à une continuité historique inscrite dans le corps. (Khatibi, La blessure du nom propre 70)

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[81] Where he graduated from the École des Métiers d'Art and studied for a year at the École des Beaux-Arts.

[82] Where he completed a sociological thesis on Arab and Maghrebian literature. A small portion of this thesis was later published as Le roman maghrébin.

For Khatibi, Cherkaoui's response to this option was clear:

> Pas de nostalgie vis-à-vis de l'art classique arabe, mais un dialogue subtil avec la mystique soufie d'El Hallaj; pas de reproduction de la calligraphie, mais une stylisation de la lettre et de son esprit; pas de folklorisme ni aucun académisme, mais une quête visionnaire et lumineuse. ("De l'héritage au contemporain" 23)[83]

In a 1982 interview with a Moroccan magazine, Khatibi described his own endeavour in the following way: "Mon effort est d'essayer de comprendre ce qui se fait dans la "Culture" qui est cachée dans le corps, dans le désir, dans des objets apparement anodins: la calligraphie, le tatouage, le tapis, le conte, le proverbe" ("L'image cinématographique" 8).

On another flank beckoned Occidental modernism and modernity which, in Khatibi's words, posed other challenges:

> qu'il soit marocain ou non, le peintre ne doit pas croire qu'il peut impunément emprunter à l'Occident son univers technique sans être touché, atteint par l'histoire de la métaphysique

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[83] "Il s'agissait donc, depuis la colonisation, d'un jeu, sinon d'une lutte entre deux images que l'artiste se fait de lui-même et de son environnement: celle qui est comme un trouble d'identité, illustré par le regard soit folklorique, soit naïf sur l'art; et celle qui s'affirme en tant qu'expérience autonome de l'art" (Khatibi, "De l'héritage au contemporain" 24).

> occidentale. [. . .] Ceux qui utilisent la technique occidentale en croyant lui enlever son "âme" demeurent eux-mêmes saisis par la théologie.[84] [. . .] La frénésie de vouloir incorporer le savoir occidental contemporain sans comprendre quelque peu ses fondements, est d'emblée une expérience dérisoire, implacablement dérisoire. ("Envol des racines" 49-50)

Once again Khatibi notes Cherkaoui's response: "Cherkaoui a senti les limites du géométrisme, qui réduit la peinture à une construction pseudo-scientifique. Le géométrisme pose les produits de l'Art en simples ustensiles d'un monde technique" (49).

Cherkaoui's struggle gradually led him to a dialogical relationship with his condition that Khatibi describes as vital to the process of decolonization:

> cet au-delà [du ressentiment et de la conscience malheureuse] n'est pas un don accordé par une volonté simplement révoltée; il est un travail sur soi, un travail permanent afin de transformer ses souffrances, ses humiliations et ses dépressions dans la relation à l'autre et aux autres. Poser le regard sur de telles questions marque une

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[84] Khatibi acknowledges elsewhere ("Quatre propositions sur le temps technique" in Penser le Maghreb) the significant influence Heidegger's writing has had on this particular line of thought.

> douleur, et je dirais une douleur sans espoir ni désespoir, sans finalité en soi; mais, de bout en bout, une exigence globale que la vie nous impose pour nous abandonner à la même question, la première et la dernière: il n'y a pas de choix. (Khatibi, Maghreb Pluriel 11)

Elsewhere Khatibi writes that "la double critique consiste à opposer à l'épistémè occidentale son dehors impensé tout en radicalisant la marge, non seulement dans une pensée en arabe, mais dans une pensée autre qui parle en langues,[85] se mettant à l'écoute de toute parole – d'où qu'elle vienne" (Maghreb Pluriel 63). This process, in other words, entails engaging with oneself, with one's heritage, and with the West. Khatibi's conversations with Cherkaoui clearly became articulations of such a vision.

The name Khatibi offers for the "cheminement différent" that Cherkaoui, and he, sought, is "la calligraphie des racines." Khatibi describes what this means in the following way:

> L'Islam est une métaphysique de la Voix. Il évite le figuratif et s'ouvre au signe comme empreinte

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[85] "J'essaie de faire un peu éclater le paradigme de l'unité lui-même; il n'y a que des lieux, et qui sont tournés vers l'impossible, vers la question de l'Un. Ce qui d'ailleurs donne sa force à la religion. De la même façon, il y a des langues dans la langue [. . .]. Aucune langue n'est monolingue [. . .]." (Khatibi, Penser le Maghreb 46).

> d'Allah. Par définition (théologique), sa Face est invisible. L'art est d'emblée saisi dans la notion de création divine. [. . .] Seul Allah répresente, donne forme, crée. L'artiste ne peut prétendre, selon l'Islam, imiter le geste créateur d'Allah et arracher au vide une œuvre microscopique. Plus qu'une simple opposition au totémisme pré-islamique et à la Trinité chrétienne (incompréhensible pour les Musulmans),[86] c'est là une théorie radicale de l'invisible, selon laquelle le Coran est le texte intégral, le texte des textes. C'est par rapport à l'écriture que les autres formes de l'art se signifient et parlent. Et si nous avons ainsi désigné la calligraphie des racines, c'est qu'elle est habitée par le Coran, pour autant qu'elle accueille la Voix divine. La langue protège les racines et la calligraphie célèbre leur surgissement. ("Envol des racines" 57)

"Calligraphy of the roots" is simultaneously an æsthetic rendering of the roots, and a re-interpretation of that which informs the roots. It is, in other words, a contemporary æsthetic re-negotiation and re-translation of the intersign. Cherkaoui's work probes the complex meeting

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[86] And here Khatibi parts ways with the socio-historical theories of Grabar, which were noted earlier.

and interweaving of the Islamic intersign with the pre-Islamic Berber æsthetic vision of the world.

Cherkaoui was deeply immersed in all of these aspects of Moroccan culture. As a boy, he studied calligraphy with a renowned master but, as Edmond Amran El Maleh[87] recounts, it was clear very early on that Cherkaoui had no intention of limiting himself to the traditional calligrapher's role of copying and transcribing (12). His relationship to calligraphy was informed by two additional (familial) factors. On his father's side there was a strong mystical tradition, and one of his ancestors was a famous Moroccan Sufi (29). His mother came from a Berber family from the Atlas mountains (M'Rabet 81). Through her he was introduced to the rich heritage of Berber markings, be they in the form of tattoos, or geometrical designs on carpets, pottery and so on.

Describing this pre-Islamic Berber æsthetic, Khatibi notes that it is characterized by two modes of expression: one is figurative, whilst the other "relève d'une abstraction géométrique dont les motifs, [sont] encore vivants dans l'art populaire (tapis, céramique, poterie, et sur le corps humain)" ("De l'héritage au contemporain" 14). With the arrival of Islam there followed a convergence of the pre-Islamic, Berber geometric abstraction and the Islamic "geometric symbolism": "l'art figuratif musulman est

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[87] A prominent Moroccan writer.

lui-même un art du concept, c'est-à-dire, un art où l'image sera prise en charge par une symbolisation géométrale du monde [. . .]. Ce géométral, inspiré du Livre et de son concept divin, va trouver abri dans les arts profanes" (15). The intersign functions on both of these planes: at one level there remains the steady murmuring of a lost deeply corporeal language; at another, the unrepresentable face of Allah finds spiritual expression. The word made flesh, so to speak, in the carpets, on the body, and in Cherkaoui's paintings.

In Khatibi's work the intersign leads to a dialogue with the cultural production which lies all around him. It is clear that for Khatibi it is not a question of "looking" to the past for inspiration but rather a re-rooting of oneself in aspects of that culture in order to re-route contemporary thinking and cultural production. A calligraphy of the roots burrows into the æsthetic of the intersign: it does not turn to carpets or tattoos to simply replicate motifs but rather seeks to grasp what informed those arts. Cherkaoui's paintings which incorporated the suggestion of calligraphy, re-imaginings of tattoo markings, and re-envisioned geometric forms from carpets, pottery, and mosaics, expressed (to paraphrase the Mallarmé passage quoted earlier) not the thing itself but the effect of the thing. On the one hand, Cherkaoui's work was searching for a way of expressing the inexpressible, representing the unrepresentable; and yet on the other hand, it wished to

retain the materiality and sensuality of a carpet, a tattoo, or calligraphy:

> Calligraphie des racines. En quoi réside ce mode de peindre? Dans son contexte social, le tatouage relève d'un symbolique tribale: rites, guérison, marquage guerrier. Cela n'intéresse qu'accessoirement le peintre.[88] Ce qui circule dans la trace du tatouage c'est l'être subtil du désir. Cherkaoui engage sa recherche à capter les vibrations du tatouage, leur parole au corps. Et dans ce geste si difficile à maintenir avec rigueur, Cherkaoui rend le tatouage et sa propre écriture, non étrangers l'un à l'autre. Métamorphose légère et délicate. Velouté entr'ouvert à l'ivresse du soleil. Echappée des racines dans le chant de l'arbre. ("Envol des racines" 50)

Writing about Cherkaoui's work allowed Khatibi to articulate the nature of his own project succinctly and explicitly. It is in Cherkaoui's paintings that Khatibi encountered the first expression of the possibility of an alternative path, a way out of the binary in which Morocco and Moroccans appear to be caught. For Khatibi, Cherkaoui's paintings are the closest anyone has come to a contemporary expression which has grasped the full significance and

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[88] Nor Khatibi, of course.

potential of the intersign. Cherkaoui's strivings offered Khatibi a perfect example of the particularity of Moroccan cultural expression in which Islam's mystical traditions merged will all forms of local expression to create new meanings.

Khatibi's conceptualization of Islam and the intersign are best understood in mystical terms: "'Ni serviteur soumis, ni maître absolu, mais simplement intermédiare. L'artiste occupe ainsi une place bien modeste. Il ne revendique pas la beauté de la racine, elle a seulement passé par lui'" (46). This quote by Paul Klee cited by Khatibi in "Envol des racines" strikes me as a distinctly mystical understanding of art and the artist, and "Envol des racines" is full of such mystical sentiments: "La racine s'écarte d'elle-même pour vibrer dans le vent" (48); "L'art parle à partir de la nervure de ses racines les plus voilées, et se recueille dans le vent" (45); and, significantly, Khatibi closes his essay with a meditation on Cherkaoui's interest in El Hallaj:

> Le voyage mène Cherkaoui à une nostalgie mystique. Le peintre se trouve épris par la voix d'El Hallàj. Et ce n'est pas là une nostalgie hasardeuse: la calligraphie des racines se règle sur sa réception du sacré, elle s'élance vers la beauté du soleil.
>
> Le mystique brûle dans l'union de l'aimé et de l'amant. Il <u>voit</u> Allah et célèbre ce regard qui

> le traverse. Regard transi. Allah se voit lui-même dans l'œil du mystique. (57)

This deeply mystical quality of Khatibi's reflections are even more strongly grounded in his writings on Islamic calligraphy. In The Splendour of Calligraphy he writes:

> Every text, whether sacred or secular, carries within it a desire to imagine the reader who approaches it. Therein lies its dream of eternity. What is the nature of the imagined reader within the ambit of Arab calligraphy? Recall the first words revealed to the Prophet Muhammed, "Read, recite." Does not the word Qur'an also mean the act of reading and recitation? Read the world and the heavens as a table of signs. You are first and foremost a reader, then a believer. (Khatibi, The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy 6)[89]

Khatibi's view of the spiritual dimensions of calligraphy is part of the double critique he applies to the existing analyses and explications of Islamic calligraphy. Most works on calligraphy are typically made up of a historical overview of the origins of the Arabic language followed by a cataloguing of the various calligraphic

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[89] From the revised translated edition of L'art calligraphique arabe (re-titled L'art calligraphique islamique and published in 1994); I was unable to locate a copy of the original French text.

styles. Any spiritual aspect attributed to calligraphic expression is commonly limited to the observation that Arabic was the language in which the Qur'an was revealed, and that calligraphy evolved as a representation of the sacredness of that text.

The following remarks are typical of the prevailing trends in critical writings: "Calligraphy was the greatest of Muslim achievements and the finest form of Islamic art," writes Manijeh Bayani, "not because representational art was forbidden but because of the divine purpose of writing" (Bayani 8); "It must be emphasized that the Qur'an has always played a central role in the development of Arabic script," notes Yasin Hamid Safadi, "The need to record the Qur'an precisely compelled the Arabs to reform their script and to beautify it so that it became worthy of the divine revelation" (Safadi 9). Papadopoulo attempts to reflect on the import of Arabic calligraphy a little more deeply, but ends up in a rather cold, reductionist, analytical place:

> Its own inherent plastic qualities, the vertical shafts that counter the horizontals in a sort of counterpoint and punctuate the loops, the possibility of varying the relationship between the height of the shafts and that of the loops as well as of playing on the width of the latter and the length of the horizontal lines, all these afford variables in the relationship of forms rich in plastic potentialities and are conducive to

> setting up rhythms through the repetition of the shafts. (165)

It is clear throughout Papadopoulo's work that a significant aspect of Islamic abstraction is its "autonomous" function, an attribute he believes it shares with twentieth century Occidental art: "the æsthetic of [Islam's] works respects exactly the same ideals as contemporary Western art and, moreover, for the very same reasons: the refusal to imitate mere appearances, the rejection of the mimesis that Plato and Aristotle had proposed as the ideal of all art" (24).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his foreword to Titus Burckhardt's Art of Islam, comments on the apparent similarity between abstract expressions but concludes that the impulses towards abstraction in the two æsthetic traditions are radically different, and that the move towards abstraction was not imposed upon Muslim artists, as Papadopoulo suggests, but was rather an expression of the internal logic and nature of the Islamic sign. Burckhardt situates calligraphy within a broader spiritual context:

> It could be said that this ubiquity of the Qur'an works like a spiritual vibration – there is no better term to describe an influence which is both spiritual and sonorous – and this vibration necessarily determines the modes and measures of Muslim art; the plastic art of Islam is therefore, in a certain way, the reflection of the word of the Qur'an. [. . .]

> But the most profound link between Islamic art and the Qur'an is of another kind: it lies not in the form of the Qur'an but in its haqiqah, its formless essence, and more particularly in the notion of tawhid, unity or union, with its contemplative implications; Islamic art – by which we mean the entirety of plastic arts in Islam – is essentially the projection into the visual order of certain aspects or dimensions of Divine Unity. (Art of Islam 45-46)

As a consequence, his analysis of the calligraphic form contrasts sharply with Papadopoulo's, even though the geometrical references are, of course, identical:

> the horizontal movement of the script, its aspect of "becoming," tends to confuse and level out the essential forms of the various letters; but, on the other hand, the horizontal shafts of these letters "transcend" and interrupt the flow of the writing. The vertical is therefore seen to unite in the sense that it affirms the one and only Essence, and the horizontal divides in the sense that it spreads out into multiplicity. (47)

Khatibi would agree with Burckhardt, I believe, that the Qur'an "works like a spiritual vibration" (which could certainly be likened to Khatibi's notion of the

intersign[90]), but he is not satisfied with limiting an analysis to Sufi principles. For one thing, there is a sensuous materiality to Khatibi's relationship with the world which is lost in a strictly mystical Weltanschauung. Also lost would be the semiotic aspect of his analysis, and ultimately the notion of the intersign itself. It is the intersign which creates the bridge between the mystical and the material, between the post-structral signifier and the carpet. Nor is he ready to limit calligraphy's significance to a kind of æsthetic consolation prize: "D'emblée, il faut déplacer la proposition courante qui dit que la calligraphie est une compensation à l'interdit jeté par l'Islam sur la figuration du visage divin ou humain" (L'art calligraphique arabe 28). For Khatibi, calligraphy is to be understood not simply as an attempt to convey the inimitable beauty of the Qur'an, but rather a representation of the very nature of the Qur'anic sign. Calligraphy simultaneously presents words in all their signifying glory, and frees them from signification:

> En quoi une langue est-elle calligraphique? L'art calligraphique n'est point un simple décor, sa

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[90] "On ne peut penser l'espace (du calligramme) sans le mouvement temporel et le rythme. Nous aurions aimé dire un peu mieux la relation entre musique et calligraphie, relation non point d'exacte homologie cinétique, mais ce par quoi tremblent ces deux arts, en une pulsion déroutant la logique du sens et sa rhétorique" (Khatibi, L'art calligraphique arabe 2).

> germination s'inscrit et prend vol dans la structure singulière d'une langue. C'est cette singularité [. . .] qui règle la force, le rythme et le chromatisme du graphe. La calligraphie touche à toute l'organisation de la langue et de l'écriture en tant que simulacre. Dans l'Islam, elle magnifie le visage caché d'Allah. (L'art calligraphique arabe 102).

Khatibi argues that calligraphy signifies at three levels simultaneously. The first is phonetic: each phoneme is there, clearly legible, but calligraphy "le dissocie et l'associe plus musicalement. Phonème donc comme signe d'engendrement polyphonique" (La blessure du nom propre 186). The sign, at its primary level, is reconfigured by calligraphy and reconsidered by its reader who is thereby invited into an additional and alternative relationship to signification:

> Calligraphy derives its strength from the act of reading, and that of looking without reading. There is at all times an imbalance between the two, a displacement, a scansion and a loss of meaning. [. . .] [Calligraphy] opens the way to another stage of reading, that of the writer, who searches continually for an emotional and perceptional rhythm for the written structure that he strives to create. It is within the very syntax of a style that one senses this desire for

> rhythm and for ways of varying it. (The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy 214)

The second level is semantic: signification is present, – the text fully legible and coherent – but "la sur-signification engagée dans ce procès fait évaporer le sens habituel que l'énoncé produit" (La blessure du nom propre 186). The lushly rhythmical æsthetics calligraphy introduces, induces and encourages a sensuous response to the text. The corporeal relationship so developed is, in fact, an expression of the nature of the Qur'anic sign:

> Allâh est ce démiurge qui transmet aux prophètes des messages transportés et noués dans leur souffle. Et leur corps est dansé, on le sait, en un mouvement de préférence parabolique et au rythme de la prose rimée. Le signe premier se fait connaître chez Muhammad par un étrange évanouissement, par lequel la parole divine est chuchotée dans le corps transfiguré. Ce corps évanescent, irradié, en un éclair, un clin d'œil, par un transport dehors le temps. La rhétorique, l'éloquence divines sont cette présence scellée, tatouée sur un corps évanescent: écrire. (La blessure du nom propre 178-179)

The third level of signification is geometric: the geometry, the playful physicality of calligraphy runs counter to the interdictions tied to the language:

> Armature consonantique se projetant selon une ligne horizontale, au-dessus et au-dessous de laquelle se placent et se déplacent – par un jeu chromatique et musical – le triangle vocalique, les points diacritiques et les signes particuliers: cela constitue une scène pluridimensionnelle, dérivée et nouée en un temps pulsatif. (L'art calligraphique arabe 102)

Combined, these three levels overwhelm Saussurian notions of signification and transform the text into something other: "La langue le précède, mais le tracé calligraphique arrache à celle-ci le voile de son ordonnance" (La blessure du nom propre 189). Calligraphy becomes a representation of the unrepresentable. The form of its presence reveals a fundamental, inescapable absence:

> Le Coran est présenté à la fois comme une origine donnée et dérobée, absente et présente, voilée par une main céleste. Et si l'homme pouvait articuler en vacillant cet ordre transcendant, où logeait-il sinon dans les écarts et les pulsations d'une telle transparence? La calligraphie aura été le chant cursif du divin. (L'art calligraphique arabe 65-66)

Much as Khatibi praises the work of al-Ghazali, a twelfth century philosopher, "qui a tenté d'apprivoiser la philosophie et la mystique par une théologie très subtile" (L'art calligraphique arabe 51), Khatibi's work is a unique

synthesis of Islamic mysticism, Arabic linguistics and post-structural theory, each of which is transformed in its encounter with the other. To carry the analogy one step further, the cornerstone of Khatibi's "théologie subtile" is the intersign, and calligraphy can be viewed as the quintessential expression of intersemiosis:

> la temporalité du tracé calligraphique est polyphonique, intertextuelle et intersémiotique. [. . .] Ce qui se chante ici, ce qui rend le calligramme irréductible à la langue, c'est cette subtile et redoutable combinatoire non linguistique qui traverse la langue, la défigure, et appelle à une fête flamboyante du signe. (La blessure du nom propre 189)

In calligraphy Khatibi finds not only the purest expression of the intersign, but he locates in the calligrapher's ethos a model for his own endeavour. When Khatibi writes "D'où tire l'artiste musulman sa volupté? L'effacement figuratif du visage divin et humain ensource l'être dans l'écriture, dans une théorie radicale de l'écriture: tout doit passer par le texte sacré et y revenir. Texte sacré et principe axial" (L'art calligraphique arabe 228), I would suggest that he is not simply articulating the traditional sacred dimensions of calligraphy, but rather a reconceptualization of language, writing, artistic expression and meaning. When he then adds that "l'artiste musulman rejoint l'être de tout l'art: faire venir infiniment ce qui est déjà-là" (228) it

seems all too clear that this definition of a Muslim artist and Khatibi's own project are one and the same.

"Faire venir infiniment ce qui est déjà-là" is actually a fine description of the aspiration of Khatibi's most recent work in the vein I have been mining in this chapter: Civilisation marocaine: Arts et cultures. Published in 1996, Khatibi co-edited this collection of essays with long-time collaborator Mohamed Sijelmassi,[91] as well as with El-Houssaïn El-Moujahid. The work is impressive in scope collecting over forty commissioned essays by thirty seven contributors which together cover almost every aspect of Morocco's contemporary cultural expressions from oral to francophone and Arabic literatures, from rural to colonial to the most recent architectural expressions, from traditional arts to contemporary painting, from languages to religious expressions, from various forms of music to the making and enjoying of mint tea – and influences be they Berber, Mediterranean, African, colonial, Arabic, Christian, Jewish or Islamic. In the context of my reflections on

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[91] It is perhaps timely to note the extremely valuable work Sijelmassi has done over the last twenty to thirty years. Although not the theoretician Khatibi is, Sijelmassi obviously shares the same concerns and objectives. Indeed, it was Sijelmassi's initiative and work which was responsible for the first edition of contemporary Moroccan art, to which Khatibi contributed an introduction on the second edition. In addition to the collaborations with Khatibi, Sijelmassi has published a lavish collection Les arts traditionnels au Maroc in 1986 and Les enluminures des manuscripts Royaux Marocains in 1987.

Khatibi's œuvre, this volume stands as a synthesis of Khatibi's vision.

Khatibi provides the first essay, "Paradigmes de civilisation," introducing the philosophical/theoretical context which has directed the collection's assemblage. The guiding vision is that "La civilisation pivote sur un centre de gravité entre plusieurs pôles d'identification" (10). "Que le Maroc soit ce pays à la fois atlantique, méditerranéen et saharien," he continues, "qu'il soit un site divers, où se réfléchit un patio stellaire, sont certes des signes, un tracé sur la carte, visible sur le terrain et la variété légendaire de ses paysages" (10). He is insistent, for example, that Islam showed a remarkable capacity to adapt to the specificity of Morocco:

> De même que la langue arabe n'a pas effacé la langue amazigh [the dominant Berber language], de même l'art musulman importé n'a pas détruit le patrimoine initial du Maroc. Dualité féconde en complémentarité et en conflit, et qui, tantôt enrichit le patrimoine par juxtaposition et agencement des formes (par example dans la céramique ou dans le tapis), tantôt neutralise la fracture de l'identité culturelle marocaine, fracture qui menace les soubassements de la société. (13)

He adopts the same syncretic view vis-à-vis the French colonization of Morocco: "L'héritage français fait donc

partie de la civilisation marocaine" (14).[92] Furthermore, he suggests that the French occupation was not "une fracture d'identité, mais un réajustement des racines" (14).

In other words, Khatibi's essay, the values of which are reflected in the volume's diverse collection, insists that Morocco's cultural practices cannot be distilled into one mode or one definition, and that those practices are constantly in flux and constantly negotiating the present. Khatibi's work does not seek to locate identity in a particular time or place, nor does he privilege one tradition over another. What is implied in his writing is that Moroccan identity is constructed through its ever-changing and plural cultural practices. "Morocco" is not an identity or essence to be found but is located in each of those sites in ever-evolving practices. Unlike Ben Jelloun whose image of Morocco is ultimately frozen in exoticism, or Mernissi's which is trapped in a quest for an ideal, Khatibi's is a vision which takes delight in complexities and contradictions for it is ultimately those paradoxes that drive dialogue and generate ever new visions – of culture and of self. It is Khatibi's belief in Morocco's proven capacity for dialogue – dialogue that took place between

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[92] Although it must be noted that Khatibi recognizes that "le choc des civilisations fut atténué, sinon transformé par le fameux paradoxe colonial de Lyautey: occuper le pays sans détruire sa civilisation. [. . .] Peut-être l'art adoucit-il les mœurs plus passionément quand un pays domine l'autre dans le respect inquiet de sa civilisation" (14).

Berber and Arab, Muslim and Jew, Moroccan and French – that fortifies his conviction that Moroccan culture can exist at the crossroads of modernity and its rich traditions. His own critical writings become exemplars of the possibility of turning apparent contradictions and conflicts into sources of intercultural creativity. It is unfortunate, however, that at no point does Khatibi bring this critical apparatus to bear on issues of gender. For one so engaged with questions of identity construction and negotiation, Khatibi's failure to explicitly examine through his critical filter some of the issues facing women in Morocco is an unfortunate lacunæ indeed.

By erasing differences and binary oppositions imposed through discourses of power and domination, Khatibi takes hold of the power inherent in cultural expression and production. Widening the arena of the production to include all forms of popular culture, he takes a unique postcolonial stance against the preoccupation with more obviously political articulations of identity. The cultural artifacts he turns to speak volumes about a vibrant identity that embraces the Berber, the Islamic, the Arabic and the French.

Conclusion

My thesis has explored and investigated representations of Morocco through the writings of three individuals. As important as I believe these writings to be, they cannot possibly capture the full extent of Morocco's complex plurality. In conclusion I would like to suggest some of the extent of that complexity through a series of snapshot-like vignettes drawn from my personal experiences and observations in Morocco. I do not pretend to represent Morocco via these observations, nor do I for a moment presume that they speak of, or for, a Morocco. Necessarily subjective and conscious of their status as "outside" observations, I intend these "vignettes" to simply convey some of the ways in which gender is negotiated, the range in which Islam is lived, the economic injustices that remain, and the paradoxes of a culture in transition. Some of these observations may corroborate, whilst others might undermine, claims I have analyzed in the previous three chapters. Collectively I believe they confirm, however, the pluri-vocal and diverse character of Moroccan cultural and social identity. After these anecdotal reflections, I shall return to the specificity of the three writers I have studied and place them within this larger panorama of change.

A social visit with the family of a Ministerial advisor in the Department of Education. The bureaucrat-father

admonished Aline, my wife, for having dared to touch a Qur'an being shown to her by his daughter. He lectured us on the inherent superiority of Islam as it was the last revealed religion (after Judaism and Christianity). An example of its superior nature was the fact that Muslims cleanse themselves before entering a mosque, whereas Christians do not before entering a church. This, he explained, was the reason why Christians were not allowed in mosques. He had no interest in hearing the fact that I had been allowed to enter mosques throughout the Middle East (Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Egypt) and that the prohibition in Morocco only dated from the days of the French Protectorate.

Ramadan supper (ftour) at the home of Colonel Doukkali, our landlord. The meal was preceded by alcoholic apéritifs. Doubly peculiar: one is not supposed to eat or drink before the signaled time (the exact moment of sunset) is provided by the Iman (now communicated via television); furthermore, if one is a practicing Muslim one does not drink alcohol. Colonel Doukkali and his wife were not devout Muslims. He viewed strict Islamic beliefs as inappropriate for a modern state and a means of controlling the masses. Despite his powerful position as the Director of the Moroccan Air Force Academy, he had to conceal the fact that he did not observe Ramadan's fasting, even though he knew that very few people around him did.

The young men at an outside café in Chefchaouen, a small city in the Rif mountains in northern Morocco, who devoured the ftour when the Imam's call was heard, and who sat back contentedly afterwards to take great delight in smoking some hash.

The intensely mystical air around a shrine in central Fez in which are buried the remains of the Saint considered to have founded the city. The air was permeated by the scent of incense, and there were thousands of candles for sale, many lit by the entrance. There was a line-up of women waiting to go in, to touch the cloth covering the tomb and to pray. The festive air around a shrine by the sea set in an open field in Salé on a Sunday. Families were picnicing all around it, music was playing and the shrine was full of women who could spend all day there, praying, and chatting with other women.[93]

The delightful negotiations we had with a merchant in Marrakech for several pairs of Moroccan leather slippers (baboush). Familiar with all of the lines the salesmen liked to use, we began playfully tossing them back at him. We were often told that we would be blessed if we made such and such a purchase. So I told the salesman that he would

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[93] See Mernissi's "Women, Saints and Sanctuaries" in Signs (Vol. 3, 1977: 101-112).

be blessed if he would sell the slippers to us at a certain (very low) price. His humourous reply was to say that in that case, he should just stand outside his store and give the slippers away for free, assuring himself a place in paradise.

Our young concierge, El-Heshmi, an illiterate, devout, pious, and humble person whose religious values were very private. His view of Islam was far more compassionate and inclusive than our bureaucrat friend's. He was dismayed by the Ministerial advisor's behaviour and he did not agree that non-Muslims should not be allowed to enter mosques. He was equally troubled by Doukkali's consumption of alcohol. He was also frustrated by a young shoe-shine boy's angry reaction when I took a photo of El-Heshmi having his shoes shined. When I asked my friend why this young man was angry, El-Heshmi stroked his chin (a gesture evoking a beard) to indicate that he was an Islamist. El-Heshmi was equally dismissive of the worship of the saint we observed at the shrine at Salé, however; female nonsense as far as he was concerned, and not consistent with proper Muslim practice.

El-Heshmi was quite happy to chew on some narcotic plants which acted like speed, despite his devoutness. He claimed that, as far he knew, nowhere in the Qur'an was there any prohibition mentioned against that plant. He

loved to chew some before he went for a run or to his Kung-Fu classes.

The complete fascination, bordering on the obsessive, with all martial arts amongst Morocco's young men, an enthusiasm which seemed to transcend class and character. There were martial arts schools everywhere, and Hong Kong Kung-Fu movies to be seen all the time. Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan were heroes to these young men.

The omnipresence of Bollywood films, a new one in every theater every week, as well as Saturday and Sunday television matinees. The men love the action but they love the wet saris as well. Women are rarely, if ever, seen in these cinemas which also function as a safe place to get stoned. The one place we did see women at the cinema was at the equivalent of an art cinema in central Rabat. We went to see a Moroccan film with a couple of Moroccan friends (Faissal and Kamal). The male half of the audience cheered loudly when for a brief moment a woman's breasts were seen as she rose from the bed. Faissal and Kamal explained that this was probably the first time such a scene had been shown in a Moroccan film.

The abysmal French sixties and seventies soft-porn movies which sometimes preceeded the main features at cinemas. Their physical condition was horrendous, the film

itself terrible, and all of the sex and nudity had been censured to such an extent that if any one in the cinema had any interest in following a possible narrative (no one did) it was quite impossible.

The possibility of watching much more recent soft-porn on satellite television; in the major cities there were satellite dishes everywhere. The German and Polish channels in particular had a number of such programs. The German channel also featured a Jackie Chan film every Wednesday night as well as dubbed versions of "North of 60" and "Due South." In addition, one could see, via satellite, French, Spanish, Italian, British, Egyptian, Saudi Arabian and Turkish channels.

The main Moroccan channel served up daily prayers, religious sermons, national news, Egyptian films (especially of the forties and fifties), Mexican soaps, Egyptian soaps, nature documentaries, and performances of local talent, especially musical. On one occasion I saw a Berber group performing with a banjo, an electric guitar, a tambourine and a vocalist.

Music, music, music, everywhere. Of course, the inevitable, omnipresent Oum Khaltoum, who can be heard throughout the Arab world; the almost equally omnipresent Céline Dion (my theory was that they could appreciate her

without having to appreciate a French performer) the only Western star we consistently heard; a wide-range of folklore, as it was referred to by our Moroccan friends (revealingly, it was the French word which was used). That is, any music from the countryside, be it in Arabic or Berber, and there was plenty of both.[94] Algerian raï (Cheb Khaled was especially loved), Cat Stevens (how many times were we told that he was Muslim now), the great Lebanese singer Fairuz, a number of performers from throughout the Arab world who sang in a "showbiz" Middle-Eastern style, mahloun – a distinctively Moroccan variation of the classical Andalusian music which came with the Moors from Spain. Much less Western music was to be heard than I had expected. There was one lovely moment, however, when a young man, working in a "télé-boutique" (a place where one could make phone calls) was singing along to the Fugees' cover of "Killing Me Softly" on his walkman despite the fact that he knew no English so that he was simply approximating the sounds of the words. Class marked significant differences in listening habits. Morocco's elite would be

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[94] Adil Hajji is quite wrong, it seems to me, when he writes that "dans le domaine de la musique et du chant [. . .] il ne se passe rigoureusement rien. Si l'on excepte le travail [. . .] des associations de sama (chant religieux) et de musique andalouse, qui s'efforcent de faire revivre le passé, la chanson est restée figée vis-à-vis du Machrek [the Middle East] [. . .] dans un mimétisme qui confine au grotesque" (Hajji 24).

clubbers and listen to all the latest Western hits, but the rest of the population had little interest. The cultural elite on the other hand loved their Andalucian classical music; performances were shown almost every day on the Moroccan television channel, but none of our friends had any interest whatsoever in this music. Kamal and Faissal, who had both studied in France (although their families were by no means members of the elite), loved to sing songs by Jacques Brel, Edith Piaf, and any number of French chansoniers. Kamal loved Frank Sinatra more than just about anything. Everyone, everyone, loved Oum Khaltoum.

We were invited to the home of Mr. Krombi (who was responsible for the National Theater's musical bookings) to enjoy an evening of Andalusian music. His home was on a small, nondescript, poor street in Salé, Rabat's twin city across the river. The entrance was very humble, but when we entered we were led to a wonderfully lavish large room lined with beautifully embroidered couches. This juxtapostion between exterior and interior was noticeable in other houses. It was impossible to guess what the interior of a home or a building would be like by its exterior appearance. The room's arches were highly decorative in a typically Moorish arabesque style. Mr. Krombi was absolutely passionate about this music and he had invested a great deal of money over the years in this room so that it might

function as a performance space where once a week a group of friends would gather to play.

As people arrived, we sat on the bench-like couches around the room, men and women mixed, chatting. At a certain point, however, the women with whom Aline was speaking grabbed her hand and led her to the other side of the room where all the women were suddenly gathered. We later learnt that the change was caused by the arrival of guests who were far more orthodox and insisted on the gender separation. It felt odd but no one seemed to mind, and the evening carried on much as before, and the music was wonderful.

The Kuwaiti man who rented an apartment in the same building as us. He would appear every couple of months to stay for a week or two. As far as we could tell, he stayed in most of the time and there was a steady stream of young women who would come to his apartment to entertain him. Most Moroccans seemed to dislike the residents of oil-rich Gulf states a great deal. Not only did they not share their wealth, not only were they perceived as American allies, but they would come to Morocco for sex which was much more available than in their home countries. It took me quite some time to realize that it was a pretty safe bet that if a Moroccan woman was sitting alone in a cafe, she was a prostitute.

Hamid's (a friend) anger and frustration with the moral constraints Islam imposed on his life (apart from Colonel Doukkali, he was the only person I met who openly and, in his case angrily, dismissed the values of Ramadan). He was seeing a young woman from Meknes; this was no easy matter, however. She would travel to Rabat under false pretences and would have to return that night or the following day. They could not meet in his apartment because of a prying concierge so they would use Kamal's apartment. Faissal and Kamal disapproved of this behaviour because they knew he had no intention of pursuing a real relationship with her but they did not begrudge him either. That is, as young men, they shared his sexual frustration and the huge difficulties involved in meeting women.

Faissal and Kamal's sudden nervousness when a small group of women entered a café courtyard in which we were sitting. Once the women had left, Faissal explained that they had managed to arrange to meet two of the women for a date on the following day. Both women worked behind the counter at a café across from their workplace in central Rabat to which they went at least twice a day. There had been no question, however, of their actually talking directly to the women at their workplace, but Faissal had managed to catch one of the woman's eye and she had smiled. This was enough to signal to him that it would be alright to

talk to her after work. So Kamal and Faissal had "bumped into them" as they left work, and they had managed to make arrangements to meet.

We were never able to determine what exactly Jazira, a female friend, got up to. That is, we could never decide if she was a prostitute or not. She was a young professional woman who always dressed very sharply (à la française) and who was very proud of her fluency in French. Not long after we had moved into our apartment she asked us if we would like to go to a hotel on the seaside, miles away in the distant suburbs of Rabat, to hear a Moroccan band playing and to dance. She negotiated the fare with a cab and arranged a time for pick up. When we got to the hotel, however, it turned out that the regular Saturday event had been superseded by a wedding party. Meanwhile, the taxi had left and we were stranded. Furious because she had phoned the hotel earlier to confirm the event, our friend berated the hotel staff to such an extent that they eventually called out a member of the wedding party. Before we knew what was happening we were part of the wedding celebrations. Jazira became extremely friendly with the man who had let us in, whom she knew, it turned out, through his wife at her workplace. There was a great deal of flirtation, and much more physical contact, albeit discreet, than seemed appropriate under the circumstances. At one point, she pulled her sister aside, and the two argued at length; it

seemed that there was another man who was interested in similar attentions but her sister was not at all keen. Eventually, she very grudgingly conceded, and the four of them left the hall for awhile. In Rabat, Jazira would go regularly to the cafés in the evenings after work with friends.

We attended a panel discussion at the French Cultural Center in Casablanca – "L'Écriture: Arme des femmes" – that featured three female writers: Bahaa Trabelsi, a young Moroccan writer in her early twenties who had published a first novel in French, Une femme tout simplement, Fadéla Sebti, a lawyer in her forties, who had published a novel Moi Mireille, lorsque j'étais Yasmina, and Calixthe Beyala, a Camerounian novelist who had just been awarded (December 1996) the "Grand Prix du Roman" by the French Academy for her novel Les honneurs perdus. Une femme tout simplement had caused some scandal when it was published for it told the story of a mother who had an extended affair with her daughter's fiancée and later, husband.[95] In Fadéla Sebti's

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[95] Her most recent novel Une vie à trois recounts the love affair that develops between two young Moroccan men when one, a comfortable bourgeois educated in France (Adam), picks up the other who has been forced by poverty into male prostitution in Casablanca (Jamál). There was decidedly very nervous laughter in the audience in Casablanca when Trabelsi described the broad outlines of this story to her audience back in 1996.

novel, a young French woman marries a Moroccan man she met while he was studying in France. He changed, however, when they moved to Morocco; she is eventually repudiated and commits suicide. For me, the novel was racist and described Morocco and Moroccans much as Not Without My Daughter represented Iran and Iranians. The different positions taken by the women were fascinating. Sebti's arguments were steeped in anger, and she spoke from a feminist position which was very familiar to me (that is, it sounded very much like Western feminism). Trabelsi strove to distance herself from feminism altogether and denied that there was anything political about her writing. She thought that the panel's topic was silly and irrelevant. A gentleman in the audience chastized her at one point for writing such terrible things about her father and mother (that is, the parents in the novel). It was quite improper, he said, to say such things about one's father.

Farid, a friend who expressed intense anger at the repressive nature of Moroccan society and orthodox Islam. I was always (probably unfairly) a little wary of pursuing such conversations with him as there were definitely "spies" about. Certainly he spoke very forcibly once he knew me a little but always in a loud whisper. A product of radical student politics, he spoke of Hassan II's brutal repressions, the lack of democratic practices, and the corruption of the elite.

The hushed tones used by a young bouquiniste whenever he would mention, discreetly, the lack of democracy and freedom of speech in Morocco. A graduate of Arab philosophy, he had been, like so many young people, unemployed, so, he had opened a tiny used bookshop. On one occasion I asked if he ever came across copies of Souffles, a radical and very influential magazine published in Morocco in the late sixties and early seventies. He looked at me knowingly and said "il n'y a plus de 'souffles' ici maintenant."

Any package you received from, or sent, abroad was examined, in your presence, before it was handed over to you or mailed. I had sent a package of books to myself in advance from Canada. I was not allowed to collect the books until I had spoken to an official at the Ministry of the Interior to whom I had to explain the nature of the material and why I needed it. The books which had attracted her attention were those in which the word "Islam" appeared in the title. I explained that they were introductory works meant for a Western reader who knew nothing or little about Islam. Eventually convinced, the official agreed to release the books but not before I had signed a form which swore that none of the titles posed any threat, nor ran counter to, Morocco's moral and religious values.

I once lost my identity card and needed to go to the police station to report its loss and to have a temporary one issued (carrying an identity card at all times was mandatory). Very, very reluctantly El-Heshmi, who never hesitated to help others whenever he could, agreed to show me where the station was, but, as we approached he became more and more anxious and at a certain point would go no further. We were close enough for him to indicate where it was but he refused to go near the station itself.

Faissal and Kamal, both computer engineers, worked for the ONTP (Organisation Nationale des Télécommunications et la Poste) as key personnel responsible for maintaining and expanding the fledgling internet which had only been established in November 1995. Kamal was particularly proud of his occasional trips to the Princess's home where he set up her internet connection and solved any problems she had with either her computer or her connection.

We had tremendous difficulty with our internet connection; it took many weeks of frustration before we finally learnt that most of the phone switches in the Moroccan phone system were terribly outdated, some from the 1950's. They were physically incapable of maintaining an internet link which requires a steady signal, because the transmission would drop out all the time. If Morocco hoped to become truly connected all of those switches would have

to be changed. There are, of course, very limited funds for such an enterprise.

The incredible poverty I'd see as the train from Rabat rolled through Casablanca's outskirts; vast bidonvilles which seemed to go on for kilometers. Also known as champignons because they were sprouting up everywhere and expanding so rapidly. Every major city has its bidonvilles in which are crammed hundreds of thousands of people in tiny sheet-metal shacks. Some of the bidonvilles have been established for decades. The bus from Rabat to the birthday party in Salé passed through such a bidonville now in the center of Salé. Around Casablanca especially, there are immense areas of impoverishment in which there is no infrastructure at all: no running water, no sewage, no garbage disposal, no roads, no street lights, no bus service, no schools, no health centers. Only recently have the conditions in these slums and their devastating social consequences been brought into a larger public discourse.[96]

I glimpsed from a city bus a young boy dying on the side of the road, struck by a vehicle. There was great

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[96] Aïcha Ech-Channa's work Miseria: Témoinages recounts many (often horrific) stories she has witnessed after thirty-five years of social work in and around Casablanca. Rachida Yacoubi's autobiographical work Ma Vie, mon Cri describes twenty years of desperation and struggle to pull herself out of Casablanca's slums.

distress around him, and I knew he did not stand a chance. To be helped, an ambulance had to be called, but running to the houses across the street was no guarantee for many homes had no phones; if a call was made, there would have to be an ambulance available – not obvious for there were, of course, far fewer ambulances than were needed.

The health system is prohibitively expensive for almost all Moroccans. A friend visited a young cousin (32) who was hospitalized and desperately required a heart operation to survive. The family did not have the necessary money, without which the doctor would not proceed. The family was therefore contacting the extended family for financial support. There were personal appeals for financial contributions every single day in the daily papers for any number of operations, or for unaffordable medications.

In the case of education, the funds made available were largely squandered. For example, a small portion of awarded IMF funds was used to build schools in rural areas. When the IMF inspectors were scheduled to make an appearance, local officials would round up all of the children to ensure that the schools were full and the project appeared to be a success. However, although school attendance was officially mandatory, few children in rural areas remained in class for largely financial, but also cultural, reasons. As the publishing editor of one of Morocco's largest publishing

houses, Afrique-Orient, explained to me, no effort had ever been made to adapt the education system to rural needs, nor to explain the benefits of education to a wary rural populace.

Amongst the columns of the ruins of an ancient mosque in Rabat which overlooked the river, students walked up and down, up and down reciting phrases and passages they had to learn for school. Seated at the base of the columns were two or three students of all ages studying together. There were students studying outside throughout Rabat – in parks, on benches – in large part because studying at home was impossible: very few lived in homes large enough for any privacy and quiet. But also because of the lack of studying facilities – libraries, study halls – at the educational institutions.

El-Heshmi's intense frustration and sense of humiliation at his illiteracy, which meant not only that he could not read and write, but also that he knew no math. Every purchase, therefore, was an occasion for a potential deception.

This is a glimpse of the Morocco Ben Jelloun, Mernissi and Khatibi have, in widely disparate ways, struggled to make sense of. A postcolonial Morocco made up of multiple

cultural, political and economic heritages, each of which is in constant interplay with the other – a site in which that plurality is simultaneously enriching and potentially destabilizing. The more multiple the other, the more plural the self may have to be; a self defined at times by gender, at others by race, cultural background, religious sensibility, economic status, level of education. These factors exist elsewhere, but in a postcolonial site as hybrid as Morocco, which was forced into an artificial modernity through colonization, and which must now, just as forcibly, confront a postindustrial global economy and communication, they figure much more prominently. What is quite clear is that there is no authentic Morocco to retreat to. My analysis of Ben Jelloun, Mernissi and Khatibi has emphasized both their engagement with these sources of tension and their attempts to find new vistas on Moroccan culture. In recent years, all three writers have stepped back to reflect upon fulfillments or syntheses. We have already noted Mernissi's intellectual adjustments. The very title of Khatibi's co-edited work, Civilisation marocaine, represents a certain resignation, in some respects, in the face of the obvious impossibility of the formation of a greater cultural and economic Maghreb with Algeria and Tunisia, a desire often expressed in his early writing. In an interview with a Moroccan journalist at the time of the publication of La nuit de l'erreur in 1996, Ben Jelloun commented that "il y avait une maturité à laquelle

j'aspirais et ce livre devait être le livre de ma maturité" ("Entretien avec Tahar Ben Jelloun" 5). He adds that this novel was "un projet qui mettait la barre un peu haut dans la mesure où je reprenais la plupart [de mes] thèmes mais les affinais un peu plus en les approfondissant" (6). There is, in other words, a sense about his work that what he needed to say has been said.

Nevertheless, the tensions Ben Jelloun, Mernissi and Khatibi engaged with and articulated are far from resolved, hence the continued relevance and vitality of their work. Morocco's past – both precolonial and colonial – remains very present, and all three writers have had to deal with those pasts in their struggles to articulate possible futures. They have each provided material rich in possibilities, to which a new generation of writers and thinkers now respond in a number of ways. Abdelhak Serhane, for example, has taken up paths left by Souffles and Ben Jelloun's fiction and made them his own in a series of powerful and disturbing novels and essays.[97] Bahaa Trabelsi may have turned her back on any "official" feminist discourse but her novels clearly challenge the moral status

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[97] His fiction includes Messaouda, Les enfants des rues étroites, Le soleil des obscurs, Le deuil des chiens, while his essays include L'amour circoncis, and Le massacre de la tribu.

quo.[98] Hinde Taarji, a young woman whose work first appeared as a journalist in Kalima, a magazine which specifically targeted a literate and francophone female audience, has followed a course inspired by Mernissi's calls for democratic structures.[99] Les voilées de L'Islam, for example, in which she travels throughout the Islamic world to talk to women about their relationship to Islam, is replete with the same tensions we observe in Mernissi's work. Taarji wants to counter Western stereotypes by humanizing the women but cannot hide her frustration with Islam's strictures and with those women who fight for women's rights on the one hand, but willingly veil themselves, for example, on the other. If Civilisation marocaine might signal a defeated dream, far more importantly it brings together a number of writers who, despite the diversity of their approaches and the range of their topics, share Khatibi's vision of a culturally plural Morocco. It will be fascinating to see where those visions lead.

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[98] It is the woman Adam marries as a cover for his relationship with Jamal, for example, who has the final say in Une vie à trois.

[99] Mernissi contributed a number of very significant essays to Kalima, I might add, on a range of topics. Kalima was forced to close by the Moroccan authorities in 1989.

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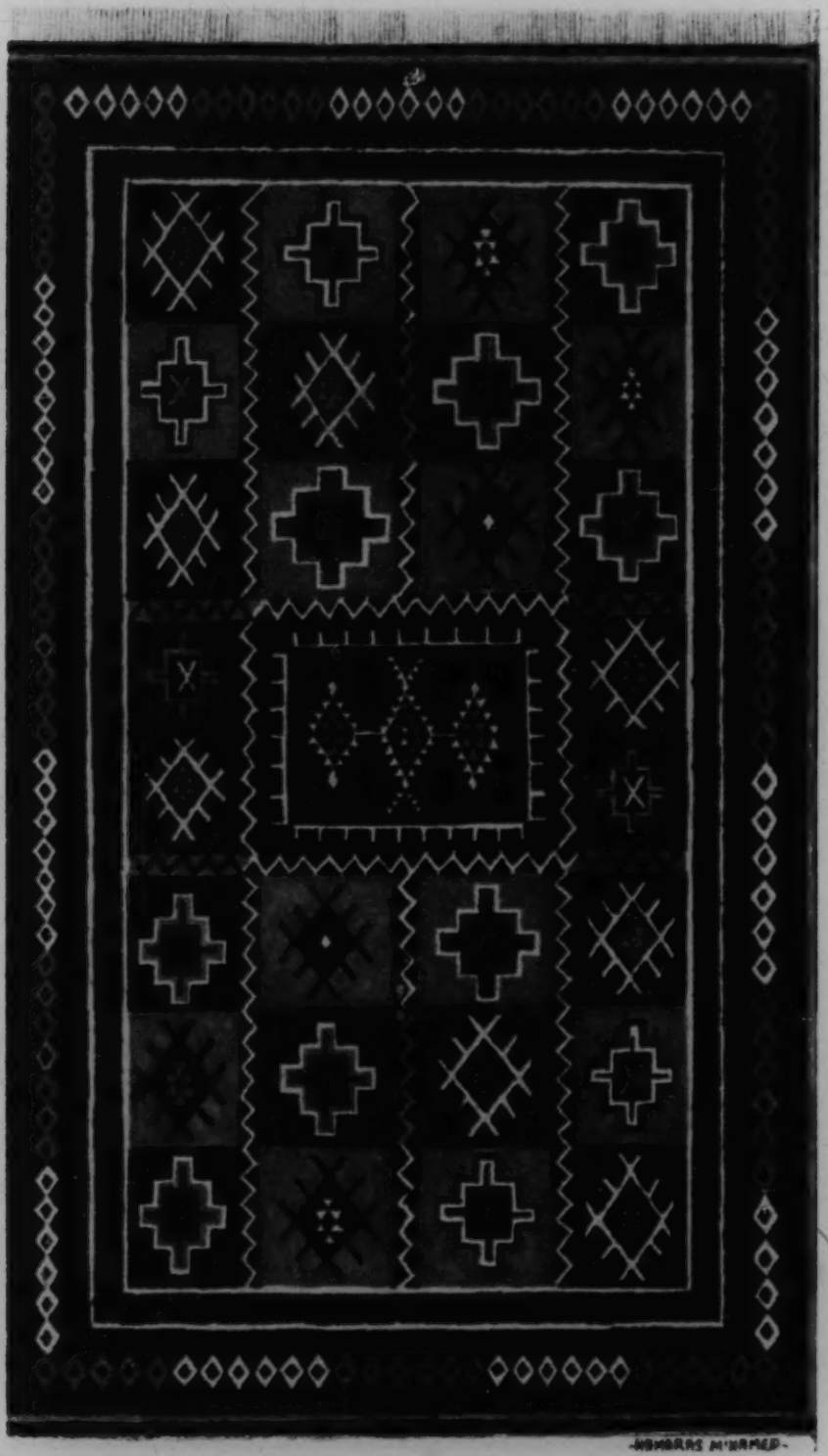
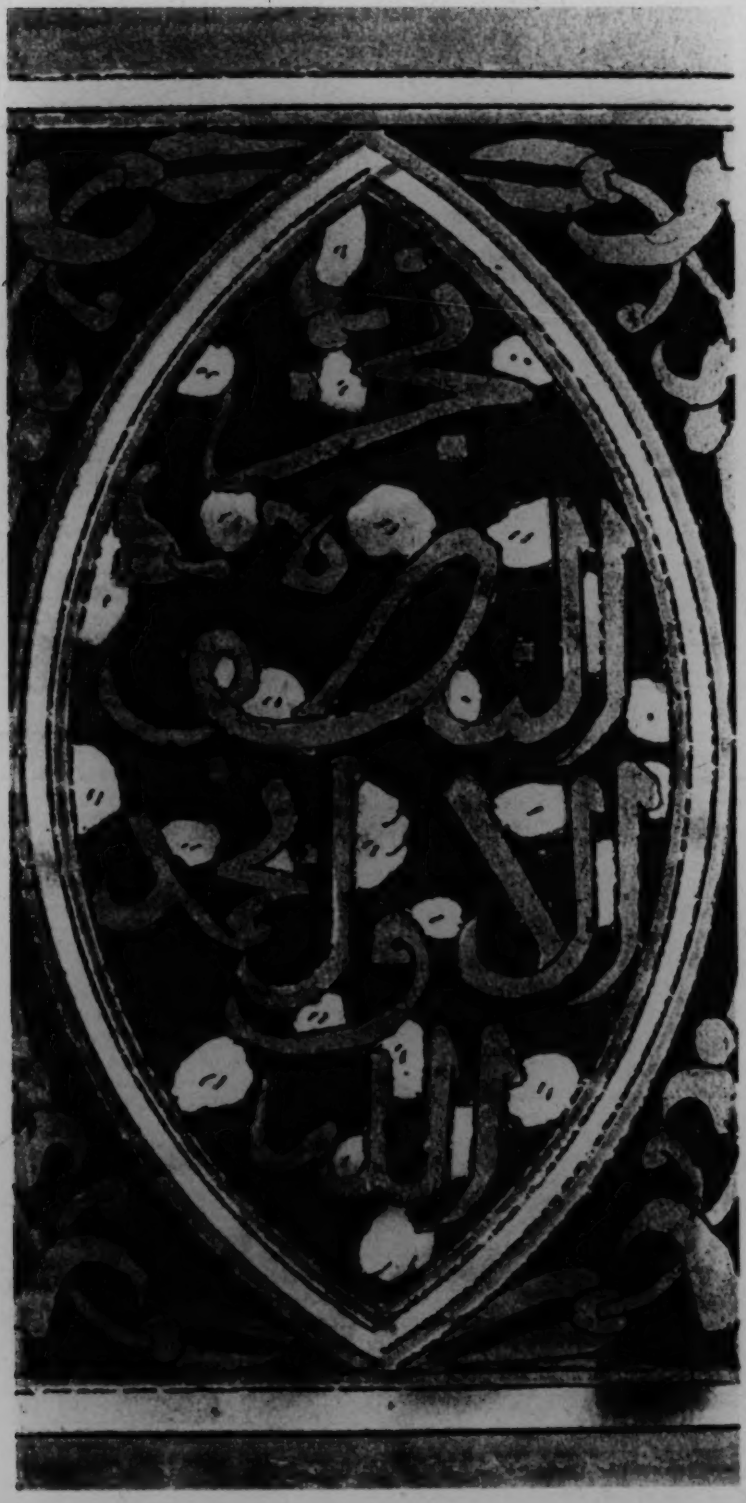
Appendix A: Carpet from the Middle Atlas region, Morocco



Appendix B: Carpet from the central Middle Atlas region, Morocco

Appendix C: Untitled painting, Ahmed Cherkaoui

Appendix D: Polychrome Maghrebi Script

Extract from the Dakhira, a text of the Sharqawa religious sect (Morocco)

Appendix E: Maghrebi Script (a medallion).